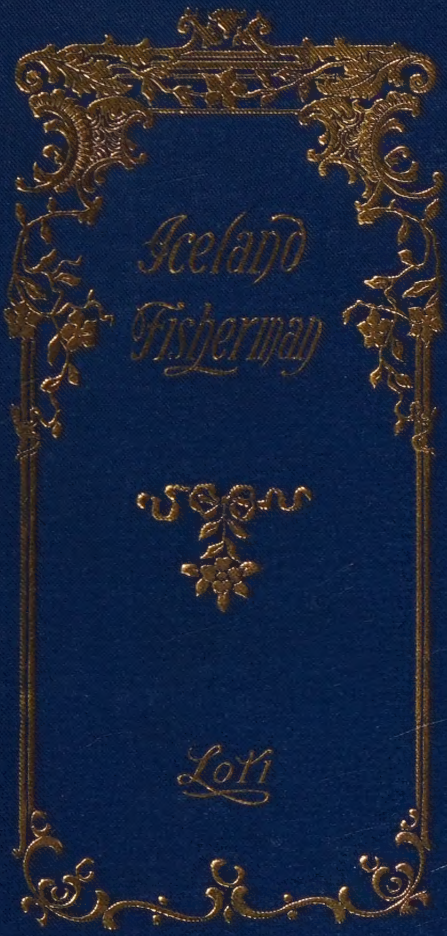
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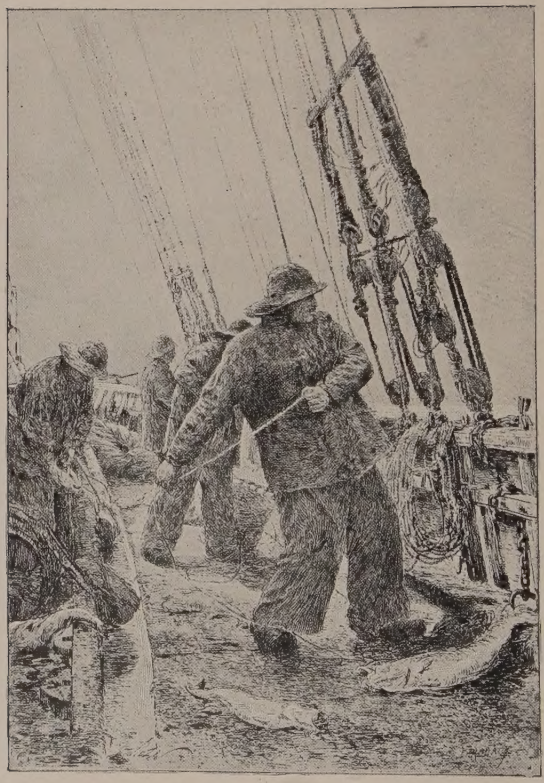
# AN ICELAND FISHERMAN



"The fishing went on rapidly."

# AN ICELAND FISHERMAN BY PIERRE LOTI . . . . . .

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AN

# ICELAND FISHERMAN

*TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH*

OF

PIERRE LOTI

OF THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

By HELEN B. DOLE

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-NINTH EDITION

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# AN ICELAND FISHERMAN.

## PART FIRST.

### I.

FIVE tremendously broad-shouldered men, leaning their elbows on a table, sat drinking together in a gloomy sort of abode, smelling of brine and the sea. The habitation, too low for them to stand upright in, grew narrower at one end, like the inside of a great empty sea-gull. It rocked slightly, giving forth a monotonous, slow, drowsy moaning.

Outside there was surely the sea and the night, but there was no evidence of it: one single opening in the ceiling was closed with a wooden cover, and an old hanging lamp lighted them as it swung to and fro.

There was a fire in a stove; their wet garments were drying before it, and emitting steam, which mingled with the smoke from their clay pipes.

Their massive table filled the room; it was exactly the same shape, and there was just space enough around it to sit on the narrow lockers fastened to the oaken walls. Great beams extended above them, almost touching their heads; and behind their backs,

berths, seemingly hollowed out of the thickness of the timber-work, opened like the recesses of a receiving-tomb. All this wood-work was coarse and defaced, impregnated with dampness and salt, worn and polished by the friction of their hands.

They had been drinking wine and cider from their porringers; so the pleasure of living lighted up their frank, honest faces. Now they were still sitting at the table and talking, in the Breton dialect, about women and marriage.

A Holy Virgin in faïence stood on a shelf against a panel at the farther side of the room, in a place of honor. She was rather old, the patron saint of these sailors, and colored in a very simple style of art. But characters in faïence are much longer preserved than real people; and her red and blue dress made a bit of freshness in the midst of all the sombre grays of this poor wooden house. She must have listened to more than one ardent prayer in hours of anguish. At her feet were nailed two bouquets of artificial flowers and a chaplet.

The five men were dressed alike. A thick blue woollen knitted jacket covered the upper part of the body, and was tucked into the trousers; on their heads they wore a kind of tarpaulin called sou'wester or *suroît* (from the name of the southwest wind, which, in our hemisphere, brings rain).

They were of different ages. The captain might have been forty, three others from twenty-five to

thirty. The last, whom they called Sylvestre or Lurlu, was only seventeen. He was already a man in height and strength; a very fine, very curly black beard covered his cheeks, but he still kept the eyes of a child, — they were of a gray blue, extremely soft and very innocent. Very close together, for lack of room, they seemed to feel really comfortable thus ensconced in their gloomy home.

Outside there was surely the sea and the night, the infinite desolation of the deep black waters. A copper watch, hanging on the wall, indicated eleven o'clock, — eleven o'clock in the evening, doubtless, — and the sound of rain was heard on the wooden roof.

They were discussing merrily together about questions of marriage, but without saying anything improper. No, it was all about the plans of those who were still single; or amusing stories of events which had taken place in the vicinity during wedding festivities. Occasionally, with a good laugh, they would make a little too frank allusion to the pleasure of loving. But love, as men of this stamp understand it, is always a wholesome thing; and even in its crudity, it remains almost chaste.

However, Sylvestre was getting weary on account of another sailor called Jean (a name pronounced Yann by the Bretons), who failed to appear.

Sure enough, where was this Yann? Still at work on deck? Why did n't he come down to enjoy his share in the fun?

"It will soon be midnight," said the captain. And, rising to his full height, he lifted the wooden cover with his head, in order to call through the opening to Yann. A very strange gleam of light then fell from above.

"Yann! Yann! . . . Eh! you man!"

The *man* replied roughly from outside.

And this pale gleam, which came in for a moment when the cover was lifted, bore a strong resemblance to daylight. "Almost midnight!" . . . Yet it was very like a ray of sunshine, like twilight sent from a long distance by means of mysterious mirrors.

As soon as the hole was closed, night returned, the little hanging lamp began to shine yellow again, and the man with his heavy sabots was heard coming down a wooden ladder.

He entered, obliged to double up like a great bear, for he was almost a giant. And at first he made up a face, pinching the end of his nose, on account of the pungent smell of brine.

He surpassed the ordinary proportions of men a little too much, especially in his shoulders, which were as straight as a bar. From a front view, the muscles of his shoulders, standing out under his blue shirt, formed two balls above his arms. He had large restless brown eyes, with a fierce, proud expression in them.

Passing his arms around this Yann, Sylvestre drew him affectionately toward him, after the manner of

children; he was betrothed to his sister, and treated him like a big brother. Yann allowed himself to be caressed with the air of a petted lion, responding with a broad smile, and showing his white teeth.

His teeth, having had more room to be arranged in than other men's, were rather far apart, and seemed very small. His blond mustache was very short, though never trimmed; it was curled very tight in two little symmetrical rolls above his lips, which had exquisitely delicate outlines; and then the two ends were somewhat frizzed on each side of the deep corners of his mouth. The rest of his beard was close-shaven, and his ruddy cheeks retained a fresh velvetiness, like fruit which has never been touched.

The glasses were refilled after Yann had seated himself, and they called the cabin-boy to replenish the pipes and light them again. This gave him a chance to smoke a little himself. He was a sturdy little fellow, with a round face, a sort of cousin to all these sailors, who were more or less related to one another. Outside of his work, which was quite hard, he was the spoiled child of the vessel. Yann made him take a drink from his glass, and then he was sent to bed.

Afterwards the great conversation about marriage was continued: —

"And when shall we celebrate your wedding, Yann?" asked Sylvestre.

"Such a big man as you are," said the captain, "aren't you ashamed, at the age of twenty-seven, to be unmarried still? What will the girls think of you when they see you?"

He replied by shrugging his terrible shoulders, in a manner very uncomplimentary to women.

Yann had just finished his five years' service in the navy. There, as gunner of the fleet, he had learned to speak French and hold sceptical views. Then he began to tell them about his last love-affair, which, it seemed, had lasted two weeks.

It was at Nantes, with a singer. Returning from sea one evening, he went, slightly intoxicated, into an alcazar. At the door stood a woman selling enormous bouquets for twenty francs apiece. He had bought one, hardly knowing what he did, and then, as soon as he entered, he threw it with all his might straight into the face of the one who was singing on the stage, — partly as a sudden declaration, partly in derision of the painted doll, whom he found too rosy. The blow knocked the woman down; afterward, she adored him for nearly three weeks.

"So," he said, "when I came away, she made me a present of this gold watch."

And, to let them see it, he threw it, like a worthless plaything, on the table.

He told his story with rough words and meta-

phors of his own. But this vulgarity of civilized life was sadly out of tune among these simple men, with the deep silence of the sea evidently around them; with that glimpse of midnight-light, caught from above, and suggesting the dying summers of the polar regions.

Moreover, Yann's behavior pained Sylvestre and surprised him. He was a pure-minded child, for his aged grandmother, the widow of a fisherman in the village of Ploubazlanec, had brought him up to respect the sacraments. When very small, he went every day with her to kneel at his mother's grave and tell his beads. From the cemetery, situated on the cliffs, could be seen the gray waters of the English Channel, where his father had been lost in a shipwreck.

As his grandmother and he were poor, he had been obliged very early to go on fishing cruises, and his childhood had been passed at sea. Every night he still said his prayers, and his eyes had retained an expression of religious innocence. He was handsome, too, and, next to Yann, had the finest bearing of any one on board. His extremely sweet voice and childish intonations contrasted rather strangely with his tall figure and black beard; as he had grown up very quickly, he felt almost embarrassed at suddenly becoming so large and tall. He expected to marry Yann's sister soon, but he had never responded to any other girl's advances.

On board, there were only three berths all together, — each one for two, — and they took turns in sleeping in them, dividing the night into watches.

When their festivity was ended — a celebration in honor of the Assumption of the Virgin, their patron saint — it was a little past midnight. Three of them crept into the little black niches, resembling vaults, to go to sleep; and the three others went up on deck to continue the great work of fishing, which had been thus interrupted; they were Yann, Sylvestre, and one of their countrymen called Guillaume.

Outside it was day, perpetual day.

But it was a pale, pale light, like nothing else; it fell upon objects like the reflection of dead sunlight. Around them at once began an immense void, of no definite color, and beyond the outlines of their vessel everything seemed diaphanous, impalpable, chimerical.

The eye could hardly make out what was the sea: at first it assumed the appearance of a kind of trembling mirror, with no object to reflect; as it stretched away, it seemed to become a plain of vapor, — and then, nothing more; it had neither horizon nor contour.

The damp chilliness of the air was more intense, more penetrating than actual cold; and in breathing, one noticed a strong smell of salt. It was perfectly calm, and the rain had ceased. Above, shapeless,

colorless clouds seemed to hold that latent, inexplicable light; one could see clearly, but with a consciousness that it was night, and all these pale things were of no color possible to name.

These three men standing there had lived on these icy seas since their childhood, in the midst of their phantasmagoria, as vague and dim as visions. They were accustomed to see all this changing infinity play around their narrow house of boards, and their eyes were as used to it as those of the great sea-birds.

The vessel rocked slowly, continually making the same monotonous wail, like a Breton song repeated in a dream by a man asleep. Yann and Sylvestre quickly made ready their hooks and lines, while their companion opened a cask of salt, and, sharpening his large knife, seated himself behind them to wait.

He did not have to wait long. They had hardly thrown their lines into the calm, cold water, when they brought them up again with heavy fishes of a gray color, shining like steel.

And again and again the lively codfish were caught; this silent fishing was rapid and incessant. Their companion cleaned the fish with his big knife, flattened them out, salted, and counted them; and the pickle which was to make their fortune on their return accumulated behind them, all dripping and cool.

The hours passed monotonously, and in the great empty regions beyond the light slowly changed; now it seemed more real. What had been a pallid twilight, a kind of hyperborean summer twilight, became, without any intermediate night, something like the dawn which all the mirrors of the sea reflected in indistinct rose-colored tracks.

"You are surely going to be married, Yann," said Sylvestre, suddenly, with much seriousness this time, looking into the sea. (He seemed to know some one in Brittany who had been very much captivated by the big fellow's brown eyes, but he felt timid about touching upon this serious subject.)

"I! . . . One of these days, yes, I shall marry," and Yann smiled, still scornful, rolling his keen eyes, "but with no girl on shore. No, it will be with the sea; and I invite you all, every one of you, to the ball I mean to give. . . ."

They continued their fishing, for they could not lose time in talking: they were in the midst of an immense tribe of fishes, of a migratory school, which had been passing constantly for two days, and had not yet come to an end.

They had all stayed up the night before, and caught in thirty hours more than a thousand very large codfish; consequently their strong arms were weary, and they fell asleep. Their bodies alone remained awake, and went on fishing mechanically, while their minds every now and then dropped into

a sound sleep. But the air of the open sea which they breathed was as pure as in the first days of creation, and so invigorating that, in spite of their fatigue, they felt their lungs expanded and their cheeks refreshed.

The morning light — the real light — had come at last; as in the time of Genesis, it was divided from the darkness, which seemed to be heaped up on the horizon, and remained there in heavy masses. Now that they could see clearly, it was evident that they were emerging from the night, that the former light had been vague and strange like that of dreams.

In the thickly clouded sky there were rents here and there, like openings in a dome, through which came wide rays of silvery, rose-colored light.

The lower clouds were arranged in a bank of intense darkness, entirely surrounding the water, filling the distance with indefiniteness and obscurity. They gave the impression of an enclosed limited space; they were like curtains drawn before the infinite; like veils stretched to conceal too gigantic mysteries, which had been perplexing man's imagination. On this morning, around the little collection of boards bearing Yann and Sylvestre, the changing world outside had assumed the appearance of vast solitude; it was like a sanctuary; and the sheaves of light which came in through the openings in this temple-like dome spread out in reflections on the motionless water as on a marble vestibule. Then

another chimera gradually came into view in the far distance, — a sort of very high rose-colored prominence, which was a cape of sombre Iceland. . . .

The marriage of Yann with the sea! . . . Sylvestre kept thinking about it as he went on fishing, without daring to say a word. It made him feel sad to hear the sacrament of marriage thus turned to ridicule by his big brother; and, moreover, it frightened him, because he was superstitious.

He had been looking forward so long to Yann's wedding. He had fancied that he would choose Gaud Mével, — a fair young girl in Paimpol, — and that he would have the pleasure of seeing him married before he should have to serve in the navy, before that five years' exile, the return from which was so uncertain, and the evident approach of which was beginning to weigh on his heart. . . .

Four o'clock in the morning. The others, who had been sleeping below, came all three to relieve them. Still rather sleepy, filling their lungs with the cold fresh air, they finished putting on their long boots as they came up, and closed their eyes, dazzled at first by all the reflections of pale light.

Then Yann and Sylvestre quickly prepared their early breakfast of hard-tack; after breaking it with a hammer, they began to crunch it very noisily, laughing to find it so hard. They became quite merry at the thought of going below to sleep snug

and warm in their berths; and holding each other around the waist, they went to the hatchway, swinging themselves to the tune of an old song.

Before they disappeared through the opening, they stopped to play with a certain Turc, the dog of the vessel, a very young Newfoundland, with enormous paws, still awkward and puppyish. They teased him; he bit them like a wolf, and finally hurt them. Then Yann, frowning angrily with his changeable eyes, gave him a kick so severe that he crouched down and howled.

Yann was good-hearted, but his nature was somewhat savage; and when his physical side was alone brought into action, a gentle caress from him was often very like brutal violence.

## II.

THEIR vessel was called the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur. Every year she went on a grand, dangerous fishing expedition in those cold regions where the summer has no night.

She was very old, like the faïence Virgin, her patron saint. Her thick sides, with oaken ribs, were worn, wrinkled, and impregnated with dampness and brine, but still sound and sturdy, exhaling the invigorating smell of tar. At anchor, she looked heavy with her massive timbers, but when the strong breezes from the west were blowing, she showed her graceful

vigor like the sea-gulls roused by the wind. Then she had a fashion of her own of rising on the billows and bounding, more swiftly than many younger craft, fashioned with modern skill.

The six men and the cabin-boy were Icelanders (a brave race of mariners, scattered especially through the region of Paimpol and Tréguier, who, from father to son, devote their lives to fishing).

They had hardly ever seen a summer in France.

At the end of each winter, they received with the other fishermen, in the port of Paimpol, the parting benediction. On this fête-day, a temporary altar, always the same, was built on the quay: it took the form of a grotto in the rocks, and in the middle, amid trophies of anchors, oars, and nets, was enthroned the sweet, impassive Virgin, the mariners' patron saint, brought from the church for the occasion, always looking, from generation to generation, with the same lifeless eyes at the fortunate ones, for whom the season was to be favorable, and at those others, who were destined not to return.

The holy sacrament, followed by a slow procession of wives and mothers, sweethearts and sisters, made a tour of the port, where all the Iceland ships, decked with flags, dipped their colors as they passed. The priest, stopping before each one of them, spoke the words and made the gesture of blessing.

Then they all started off, like a fleet, leaving the country almost destitute of husbands, lovers, and

sons. As they sailed away, the crews sang together, in loud vibrating voices, the hymns to Marie, Star-of-the-Sea.

And every year the same parting ceremony, the same farewells, took place.

Then began the life on the ocean, isolation with three or four rough companions, on moving boards, in the midst of the cold waters of the hyperborean sea.

Up to this time they had always returned in safety, — the Virgin Star-of-the-Sea had protected the vessel bearing her name.

The last of August was the time for their return. But the *Marie* followed the custom of many Icelanders, merely touching at Paimpol, and then going down into the gulf of Gascony, where fish are sold advantageously, and among the sandy islands with salt marshes, to buy salt for the next voyage.

Here in the south, where the sun is still warm, the sturdy sailors, eager for pleasure, intoxicated by this remnant of summer, by the warm air, by the land, and by women, linger several days in one port or another.

Then, with the first autumnal fogs, they return to their own firesides in Paimpol or to the scattered huts in the country of Goëlo, to busy themselves for a time with their families and love, with marriages and births. They almost always find some little newborn infants, begotten the winter before and waiting

for godfathers in order to receive the sacrament of baptism: many children are needed by this race of fishermen, which Iceland devours.

## III.

One beautiful Sunday evening in May of this same year, in Paimpol, two women were very busy writing a letter.

They were in front of a large open window, the massive, ancient stone sill of which bore a row of flower-pots. Both looked young, as they bent over the table: one wore an extremely large, old-fashioned head-dress; the other a very small one, in the new shape adopted by the women of Paimpol. They were two girls in love, one might have guessed, and together composing a tender message for some handsome Icelander.

The one dictating — she with the large head-dress — raised her head as if hunting for an idea. Wait! she was old, very old, in spite of her youthful appearance as seen from behind, under her little brown shawl. Indeed, she was really aged: a good grandmother, at least seventy years old; still pretty and still fresh-looking, with her ruddy cheeks, such as some old men have the gift of preserving. Her head-dress, which was very low over the forehead and on the top of her head, was composed of two or three large muslin horns emerging one from the other

and falling over the back of her neck. All these white folds, which had a religious air about them, made a becoming setting to her venerable face. Her gentle eyes were full of a kindly honesty. She had no trace of any teeth, none at all; and when she smiled she showed in their place her round gums, like a baby's. In spite of her chin, which had become "like the toe of a sabot" (as she was in the habit of saying), her profile was not wholly spoiled by years; it was still evident that it must have been regular and pure as that of the saints of the church.

She was looking out of the window, trying to find something more of interest to tell her grandson.

Truly, in all the country round Paimpol, there was not another good old dame like her, who could find such amusing things to tell about one person or another, or even about nothing at all. In this letter there were already three or four incomparable stories, — but without the least malice, for there was nothing evil in her soul.

The other, seeing that her ideas had come to an end, began to write the address carefully: —

To Monsieur Moan, Sylvestre, on board the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur, — in the Iceland Sea, near Reikiawik.

Then she too raised her head to ask, —

"Is that all, Grandmother Moan?"

She was very young, adorably young; a girl of twenty. Very fair, — a rare coloring in this part of

Brittany, where the race is dark; very fair, with violet eyes, and eyelashes almost black. Her eyebrows, as light as her hair, seemed as if they had been retouched by a browner, darker line, giving an expression of strength and will. Her rather short profile was very noble, the nose prolonging the line of the forehead with absolute rectitude, as in a Greek face. A deep dimple indented under the lower lip gave a delicious accentuation to its curve; and from time to time, when absorbed in thought, she would bite this lip with her pearly upper teeth, making a little ruddy glow under the delicate skin. Throughout her graceful figure there was a sort of pride, a touch of gravity as well, which had come down to her from the hardy Iceland mariners, her ancestors. The expression of her eyes was both obstinate and gentle.

Her head-dress was in the shape of a shell, coming down closely over the forehead, almost like a band, then lifting high on both sides, showing thick braids of hair coiled above her ears, — a style of head-dress which has come down from very ancient times, and still gives a quaint appearance to the women of Paimpol.

One felt that she had been differently brought up from this poor old woman, to whom she gave the name of grandmother, but who, in reality, was only a great-aunt, who had suffered misfortunes.

She was the daughter of M. Mével, a former

Icelander, something of a pirate, enriched by bold enterprises at sea.

The beautiful room where the letter had just been written was her own, — with an entirely new bed in city style, with muslin curtains, edged with lace; and on the thick walls, bright-colored paper, modifying the irregularities of the granite. On the ceiling, a coating of white plastering covered the enormous beams that showed the antiquity of the house; it was the genuine habitation of a comfortable bourgeois, and the windows opened on the gloomy old square in Paimpol, where the markets and *pardons* are held.

"Is that all, Grandmother Yvonne? Have n't you anything more to say?"

"No, my daughter; only add, please, a greeting from me to son Gaos."

Son Gaos! . . . otherwise called Yann. . . . The beautiful, proud young girl blushed deeply as she wrote this name.

As soon as this was added at the bottom of the page, in a running hand, she rose, turning away her face, as if to look at something very interesting outside in the square.

She was quite tall; she wore a close-fitting waist of fashionable cut, without a wrinkle. In spite of her head-dress, she had the air of a young lady. Even her hands, without being so excessively small and slender as conventionality demands for its idea of

beauty, were delicate and white, never having been accustomed to coarse work.

To be sure, she had begun life as little Gaud, paddling barefooted through the water, motherless, running almost wild during the fishing season, when her father was away in Iceland; pretty, rosy, picturesque, wayward, obstinate, growing vigorously in the rough winds from the Channel. At this time she was taken in by poor Grandmother Moan and given Sylvestre to take care of, while she was hard at work for the people of Paimpol.

And the little girl had a motherly adoration for the other child intrusted to her care, who was hardly eighteen months younger than herself; as dark as she was fair, as submissive and affectionate as she was lively and capricious.

Unspoiled by wealth or city life, she now looked back to these early days of hers; and it came to her mind like a remote dream of wild freedom, like the recollection of a dim, mysterious period, when there was more room on the beaches, when the cliffs were surely more gigantic. . . .

When she was still very young, about five or six years old, her father, who was making money by buying and selling the cargoes of ships, took her to Saint-Brienc, and later on to Paris.

Then, from little Gaud, she became Mademoiselle Marguérite, — tall, serious, with grave eyes. Always left to herself, in another sense of freedom than that

of the Breton sands, she kept the obstinate nature of her childhood. What she knew about life had been revealed to her by chance, without any choice; but a remarkable, innate dignity had been her safeguard. Sometimes she was audacious in her ways, surprising people by speaking too freely to their faces; and her fine, clear eyes were not always downcast before those of young men. But she was so honest and unconcerned in it all, that they could not misunderstand her; they saw at once that they had to do with an honest girl, whose heart was as fresh as her face.

In these large cities, her costume was changed more than herself. Although she kept her headdress, which the Breton women are loath to give up, she had soon learned to dress in a different fashion. And her figure, unrestrained as a little fisher-maid while it was forming, — filling out its beautiful contours developed in the sea-breezes, — was compressed at the waist by the corsets worn by young ladies.

Every year she came back to Brittany with her father, — in the summer only, like the bathers, — refreshing her memory of her former life for a few days, and taking up her old name of Gaud (which in Breton means Marguérite). A little curious, possibly, to see those Icelanders, so much talked about, who were never there, and more of whom each year were missing; hearing everywhere about Iceland,

which seemed to her like a far-away abyss, and where at present was the one she loved. . . .

And then one fine day she had been brought back permanently to the country of these fishermen, through a caprice of her father, who desired to end his days there, and live like a bourgeois in this square at Paimpol.

The good old grandmother, poor and yet so nice, went away expressing her thanks as soon as the letter had been read over and the envelope sealed. She lived at quite a distance, on the edge of the Ploubazlanec district, in a hamlet on the coast, in the very same cottage where she had been born, where she had had her sons and her grandsons.

As she went through the town, she responded to many a "good-evening." She was one of the old people of the region, the last of a brave, estimable family.

Through miracles of painstaking and care, she managed to make a very good appearance in poor dresses, which had been mended and were giving out. She always wore the same little brown Paimpolaise shawl, over which the muslin streamers of her big cap had fallen for sixty years, — her own wedding shawl, once blue, and dyed for her son Peter's wedding, and since that time kept for Sundays, and still quite presentable.

She continued to walk very erect, not at all like

most old women; and really, in spite of her rather too prominent chin, with her kind eyes and delicate profile, one could not help thinking her very pretty.

She was much respected, and this was evident from the greetings the people gave her.

On her way she passed by the house of an old lover of hers, a former suitor, a carpenter by trade; he was an octogenarian, and now was always sitting in front of his door while the young people, his sons, planed the boards.

He had never been reconciled to the fact that she had not wished him either for a first or second husband; but with age this had turned to a kind of comical, half-malignant spite, and he always asked her, —

"Well, my dear, when are you going to be measured?"

She thanked him, saying that she had not yet decided to have a costume made. The fact was that the old man, by his rather dull pleasantry, meant a certain costume of boards, the last of all earthly habiliments.

"Well, whenever you like; but don't put yourself out, my dear, you know. . . ."

He had already made this same joke several times. But to-day she could hardly laugh at it; for she felt more weary, more worn out by her life of incessant work; and she was thinking of her dear grandson,

her last, who, on his return from Iceland, would go to serve in the navy. Five years! To go to China; perhaps to the war! Would she be there when he came back?

Keen pain seized her at the thought of it. . . . No; this poor old woman was certainly not so gay as she seemed, and her face contracted pitifully, as if she were going to cry.

It was quite possible, it was even true, that he, her last grandson, would soon be taken away from her. . . . Alas! To leave her, perhaps, to die alone, without ever seeing him again. . . . Some steps had been taken by gentlemen whom she knew in the town to prevent his going, as he was the support of an almost penniless grandmother, who would soon be unable to work. They had not succeeded, on account of an elder brother, Jean Moan, the deserter, who was never mentioned in the family, but was, nevertheless, still alive somewhere in America, thus depriving Sylvestre of the privilege of exemption from military service. Moreover, her little pension as a sailor's widow was an objection; she was not considered quite poor enough.

After her return, she spent a long time in prayer for all her departed sons and grandsons; then she prayed also, with ardent trust, for her little Sylvestre, and tried to go to sleep, thinking about the costume of planks, terribly heavy-hearted at feeling so old just as he was going away. . . .

The young girl remained sitting by her window, watching the yellow reflections of the setting sun on the stone walls and the black swallows circling about in the sky. Paimpol was always very dull, even on Sunday, during the long May evenings. The young girls who had no young men to pay attention to them, walked two by two, or three by three, thinking of their lovers in Iceland. . . .

"My greeting to son Gaos. . . ." It had agitated her very much to write this sentence and this name, which now would not leave her mind.

She often passed her evenings at this window, like a young lady of leisure. Her father did not like very well to have her walk with the other girls of her age, who had formerly been her companions. Then, when he came out of the café to take a short walk and smoke his pipe with the other old sailors like himself, he enjoyed seeing his daughter at her window with its stone frame, among the flower-pots, in his fine house.

Son Gaos! She looked involuntarily in the direction of the sea, which could not be seen, but was felt to be near, at the foot of the little streets through which the boatmen came. And her thoughts wandered away into the boundless regions of that attracting, fascinating, devouring thing; her thoughts travelled very far away to the polar seas, where the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur, was sailing.

What a strange boy that son Gaos was! . . . fleeting, unattainable now, after having proceeded in a way so daring, yet so sweet.

. . . . . .

Then, in her long revery, she thought over her return to Brittany, the year before.

One morning in December, after a night's journey, the train from Paris had left her father and herself at Guingamp, in the foggy, whitish, cold, early dawn, when it was still quite dark. She had been strangely impressed by the little old town, which she had only passed through before in summer. She no longer recognized it; she experienced the sensation of plunging suddenly into what is called in the country, *les temps*, — the remote time of the past. What a silence, after Paris! The tranquil life of these people of another world, going through the fog to attend to their little affairs! The old gloomy granite houses, black with dampness and the lingering shades of night; everything Breton — which charmed her now that she was in love with Yann — had seemed on that particular morning full of melancholy and desolation. The early-rising housekeepers were already opening their doors, and as she passed along she could look into the antiquated interiors, with their big chimney-corners, where the old people in their caps, who had just risen, were sitting in restful attitudes. As soon as it was a little lighter, she went into the church to say her prayers. How vast and

shadowy the magnificent nave had seemed, — so different from the Parisian churches, with its rude pillars worn at the base by centuries, its tomb-like odor of antiquity, of saltpetre! In a deep recess, behind the pillars, a candle was burning and a woman was kneeling before it, probably making some vow; the light of this slender flame was lost in the dim emptiness of the arches. . . . She suddenly found there, in herself, the trace of an entirely forgotten sentiment, a sort of melancholy awe, which she used to experience as a very little girl, when she was taken to early Mass on winter mornings, in the church at Paimpol.

However, she really felt no regret at leaving Paris, although there were many beautiful and amusing things there. At first, having the blood of mariners in her veins, she had felt shut in there. And then she felt like a stranger, out of place: the Parisian women, whose slender figures had an artificial curve in their backs, had a peculiar manner of walking, frisking about in whalebone cases; and she was too intelligent ever to try to copy these things closely. With her head-dresses, ordered each year in Paimpol, she felt ill at ease in the streets of Paris, for she never was aware that if people turned to gaze at her, it was because she was very charming to look at.

There were some of these Parisian women whose charms had a distinction which attracted her, but she knew they were unapproachable. And those of an inferior class, who would have been ready to be on

terms of intimacy with her, she held aloof from, not considering them worthy of her. So she had lived without friends, almost without society, except that of her father, who was often busy or away. She was not sorry to give up this life of solitude in a strange country.

But, nevertheless, on the day of her arrival, she had been painfully surprised by the austere aspect of Brittany in midwinter. And the thought of travelling four or five hours longer in a carriage, of having to plunge still farther into this melancholy country, in order to reach Paimpol, was very depressing to her.

All the afternoon of this same gray day, she and her father had travelled in a little old dilapidated stage-coach, open to every wind; passing, as night came on, through mournful villages, under phantoms of trees, on which the fog rested in fine drops. Soon the lanterns had to be lighted; then there was nothing more to be seen except two lines of a green color like Bengal lights, seeming to run on each side ahead of the houses. These were the rays from the two lanterns shining on the interminable hedges by the road.

How came this sudden verdure so green, in December? At first she was astonished, and leaned forward to get a better view, then she seemed to recognize it and remember the furze, the evergreen furze growing along the paths and cliffs, and never

turning yellow in the region of Paimpol. At the same time a warmer breeze, smelling of the sea, began to blow, and she thought she recognized this also. . . .

Toward the end of the journey, she had been quite aroused and amused by this thought which came to her mind, —

"Since it is winter, I shall now see the handsome Iceland fishermen."

In December, they ought to be there, all come home, — the brothers, betrothed, lovers, and cousins, of whom her friends, small and large, had talked so much on their evening walks every summer, when she was visiting there. And this idea kept her occupied while her motionless feet were freezing in the *carriole*.

She had really seen them at last, — and now she had lost her heart to one of them.

## IV.

THE first time she ever saw this Yann was the day after her arrival, at the Icelanders' *pardon*, which takes place on the eighth of December, the feast of Our Lady of Good News, the fishermen's patron saint, — just after the procession, while the gloomy streets were still decorated with white flags, worked with ivy and holly, the foliage and blossoms of winter.

At this *pardon*, the merriment was forced and somewhat wild, and the sky was melancholy, — merriment without gayety, largely compounded of recklessness and defiance, of physical vigor and alcohol; and over it all hung, less disguised than elsewhere, the threat of death.

There was a great uproar in Paimpol; sounds of bells and songs of priests; rough, monotonous singing in the public-houses; old sea-songs; old complaints from the sea, from I know not where, from the profound night of time. Groups of sailors arm in arm, zigzagging along the streets, some from their habit of rolling about on board ship, some because they were beginning to get intoxicated, casting covetous looks at the women after their long continence at sea. Groups of girls in their white muslin caps, with their lovely bosoms compressed and palpitating, their beautiful eyes filled with the longings of a whole summer. Old stone houses enclosing this uproarious crowd; old roofs telling their struggles for many centuries against the west winds, against the spray, the rains, against everything coming from the sea; telling also of the hot quarrels they had sheltered, the ancient adventures of daring and love.

And a religious sentiment, an impression of the past, hovered over all this, with a respect for the ancient worship, the protecting symbols of the white, immaculate Virgin. Next the public-houses stood the church, its steps strewn with leaves, its doors

wide open like a great sombre bay, with its odor of incense, its candles shining in the gloom, and the votive offerings of the sailors hung up everywhere on the sacred walls. Beside the girls who were engaged, walked the sweethearts of lost sailors, the widows of shipwrecked mariners, with their long mourning shawls and little smooth caps, coming from the mortuary chapels, with downcast eyes, silent, passing through the midst of this noisy life like a sinister foreboding. And near at hand the ever-present sea, the great nurse and the great destroyer of these vigorous generations, noisy, making a commotion also, taking part in the festival.

Gaud received a confused impression of all these things. Excited and laughing, yet depressed, she felt a keen pain take hold of her as she thought that this country had now become hers forever. She was walking with her friends in the square, where the games were going on and the mountebanks performing; and they were telling her the names of the different young men on every side from Paimpol and Ploubazlanec. In front of the singers of popular songs a group of these Icelanders had stopped, with their backs turned toward her. Struck by the appearance of one of them, who had the figure of a giant and tremendously broad shoulders, she said simply, with a touch of ridicule in her voice, —

"There is one who is tall enough!"

Her remark seemed almost to mean this, —

"Whoever marries him won't have much spare room in her house with a husband of such a size!"

He turned as if he had heard her, and scanned her from head to foot with a quick glance which seemed to say, —

"Who is this with a Paimpol head-dress and yet so elegant, whom I have never seen before?"

And then he quickly dropped his eyes, out of politeness, and again seemed very much occupied with the singers, showing nothing of his head except his black hair, which was very long and curly at the back of his neck.

Although she had freely inquired the names of so many others, she did not dare to ask about this one. His handsome profile, which she could hardly see; his proud, wild look; his reddish-brown eyes glancing at the opal blue of her eyes, — all this had impressed and intimidated her.

He was the very "son Gaos" of whom she had heard the Moans speak as a great friend of Sylvestre; on the evening of this same festival she and her father had met him and Sylvestre, walking arm in arm, and had stopped to exchange greetings. . . .

The little Sylvestre immediately assumed a sort of brotherly air toward her. Since they were cousins they continued to *thee* and *thou* each other; to be sure, she hesitated at first, with this tall fellow of seventeen, already wearing a black beard; but as

his honest, gentle eyes were the same as when a child, she soon felt as much at ease with him as if he had never been out of her sight. When he came to Paimpol she kept him to dinner in the evening; this was quite natural, and he ate with a very good appetite, being somewhat stinted at home. . . .

To tell the truth, Yann had not been very gallant to her during this first presentation, — at the corner of a little gloomy street all strewn with green branches. He had merely taken off his hat, in an almost timid, though very dignified manner; then having cast the same swift glance over her, he turned his eyes away, seeming to be displeased with the meeting and in haste to pass on. A strong west wind had arisen during the procession and strewn the ground with branches of boxwood, and thrown dark-gray curtains over the sky. . . .

Gaud, as she recalled all this in her revery, saw it again very clearly, — the melancholy nightfall at the end of the festival; the white flags, worked with flowers, twisting in the wind along the walls; the groups of noisy Icelanders, men accustomed to the wind and tempest, who sang as they entered the inns, to get out of the way of the coming rain: more than all, the tall fellow standing before her, turning away his head and looking annoyed and disturbed at having met her. . . . What a deep change had taken place in her since that time! . . .

And what a difference between the noisy ending of that festival and the quiet reigning now! How silent and empty this same Paimpol was on this evening, during the long May-twilight, which kept her at her window, alone, dreaming, and in love! . . .

## V.

THE second time they saw each other was at a wedding. Son Gaos had been chosen as her escort. At first she fancied that she should be embarrassed to walk through the street with this fellow who would attract every one's attention, on account of his height, and who, moreover, would probably have nothing to say to her on the way! . . . And then he really frightened her with his grand, fierce manner.

At the appointed hour, when the people had all collected for the procession, Yann had not appeared. The time was passing; he did not come; and they suggested not waiting for him. Then she realized that for him alone she had made herself ready, and with any other of the young men, the festival, the ball, would have no pleasure, no charm for her. . . .

At last he came, also dressed in his best, and, without the least embarrassment, made his excuses to the bride's parents. This was how it happened: word had come from England that great schools of fish had quite unexpectedly appeared, and would

pass that evening just off Aurigny; then every boat in Ploubazlanec had set sail in great haste. There was a commotion in the villages, the women searching in the public-houses for their husbands, pushing them to make them hurry along, struggling themselves to hoist the sails, to help manage the boats, — in short, a great confusion in the place. . . .

In the midst of all the people, he related this with the utmost composure, with gestures of his own, rolling his eyes, and with a charming smile, disclosing his shining teeth. In order to express the haste in which they sailed, he uttered every now and then, in the midst of his sentences, a certain little prolonged *hoo!* which was very funny, — this is a sailor's exclamation to express swiftness, and resembling the whistling of the wind. He had been obliged to quickly find a substitute, and to have him accepted by the captain of the vessel to which he was engaged for the winter season. This had made him late; and as he did not wish to lose the wedding, he would have to lose his share of the fish.

These reasons were perfectly understood by the fishermen who were listening, and no one was displeased with him; they knew very well that in their life, everything was more or less dependent on the unforeseen caprices of the sea, more or less subject to the changes of the weather and the mysterious migrations of fish. The other Icelanders who were there only regretted that they, as well as those in

Ploubazlanec, had not been informed soon enough to take advantage of this fortune which was about to pass in the offing.

As it was, unfortunately, too late now, there was nothing to be done but to offer their arms to the girls. The violins began to play outside, and the procession started merrily along.

At first he made only those polite meaningless remarks that a young man usually makes at a wedding festival to the young girls he does not know very well. Among all the couples present at the marriage, they alone were strangers to each other; the others in the procession were cousins or engaged. There were some pairs of lovers also; for in this region of Paimpol they get on very fast in love at the time of the return from Iceland. (But they are honest-hearted, and are married afterward.)

That evening, while they were dancing, their conversation returned to the great passage of fish, and suddenly, looking her straight in the eyes, he made this unexpected remark, —

"There is no one but you in Paimpol, — not even in the world, — who could have made me give up this expedition; no, really, for no one else would I have lost this fishing, Mademoiselle Gaud. . . ."

She was astonished at first that this fisherman should dare to speak to her thus, — to her who had come to this ball somewhat like a queen; then, deliciously charmed, she had finally replied, —

"Thank you, Monsieur Yann; I, too, prefer to be with you than with any one else."

This had been all; and from that moment to the end of the dancing, they began to talk in a different way, in lower, gentler voices. . . .

They danced to the music of the hurdy-gurdy and violin, the same couples almost always together. When he came to claim her again, after having danced with some one else for the sake of propriety, they smiled at each other like old friends, and continued their former conversation, which was very familiar. Yann told her frankly about his life as a fisherman, his hardships, and his wages, his former difficulties at home, when he had been obliged to bring up the fourteen little Gaoses, whose eldest brother he was. At present they were free from want, owing especially to a wreck which their father had come across in the Channel, and the sale of which had brought them ten thousand francs beyond the government's share. This had allowed them to build a second story to their house, which was situated on the edge of the Ploubazlanec district, in the hamlet of Pors-Even, at the very end of the land overlooking the Channel, with a most beautiful view.

"The life of an Icelander," he said, "is hard: to have to go away, as we do, in the month of February, for such a country, where it is so cold and dreary, with such a stormy sea. . . ."

Gaud recalled all their conversation at the ball as if it had happened but the day before, and went slowly over it in her memory, as she watched the darkness of the May night fall over Paimpol. If he had had no thought of marriage, why had he told her all these details of his life, to which she had listened almost as if she had been betrothed? Moreover, he did not seem like a vulgar fellow, fond of talking to everybody about his own affairs. . . .

"The occupation is a good one, all the same," he had said, "and I would not give it up. Some years I make eight hundred francs; others twelve hundred, which I receive on my return and carry to our mother."

"You carry it to your mother, Monsieur Yann?

"Oh, yes, always the whole sum. That is the custom among us Icelanders, Mademoiselle Gaud." (He said this as though it were a duty and quite natural to do so.) "So, although you may not believe it, I have almost no money. On Sunday, my mother gives me a little when I come to Paimpol. It is the same with all of us. This year, my father had these new clothes which I have on made for me, otherwise I should never have been willing to come to the wedding; oh! no, indeed, I should not have come in my last year's clothes to 'escort you.'"

These new clothes of Yann's, with a short jacket opening over a waistcoat of rather old style, perhaps did not seem very elegant to her, accustomed to the

Parisians, but the figure beneath them was irreproachably handsome, and the dancer had an imposing manner in spite of them.

He looked her straight in the eyes with a smile, every time he said anything, to see what she thought of it. How kind and honest his eyes were, while he was telling her all this, to let her understand that he was not rich!

She, too, smiled at him, as she looked steadily in his face; making little reply, but listening with all her soul, more and more surprised and attracted toward him. What a mixture of wild roughness and spoiled childishness he was! His grave voice, with others so brusque and decided, when speaking to her became more and more gentle and caressing; for her alone he made it vibrate with extreme sweetness, like the soft music of united strings.

And how singular and unusual it was that this tall fellow, with his easy carriage, his formidable appearance, always treated at home like a little child and thinking it quite natural, having been all over the world, having had all kinds of adventures and been in all sorts of danger, yet should maintain such respectful, absolute submission to his parents!

She compared him to three or four others, — Parisian gallants, clerks, scribblers, or the like, who had followed her with their adoration, for her money; and he seemed better than all the rest, and at the same time the handsomest.

To make him feel more at ease, she had told him how they too had not always been so well off; that her father had begun life as an Iceland fisherman, and felt great esteem for the Icelanders; that she herself remembered running barefooted when she was a very little girl, — on the beach, — after her poor mother's death.

Oh, that night of the ball, that delicious, decisive night standing out alone in her life! — it was already remote, since it occurred in December and now it was May. All those handsome dancers were now away fishing, scattered over the Iceland sea, — where the pale sunshine was giving them light in their vast solitude, while the darkness was gently falling over Brittany.

Gaud remained at the window. The square in Paimpol, almost entirely shut in on all sides by ancient houses, was growing darker and darker as night came on; not a sound was heard anywhere. Above the houses, the still luminous void of the sky seemed to grow hollow, to rise, to be lifted away from terrestrial things, — which now, at this twilight hour, all mingled into a single black silhouette of gables and ancient roofs. From time to time, a door or a window closed; some old sailor, with his rolling gait, would come out of a public-house, and pass along the little gloomy streets; or some young girls, returning late from their walk, would pass with bouquets of spring flowers. One, recognizing Gaud, said good-evening

to her, and lifted a bunch of hawthorn toward her as high as her arm could reach, as if wishing her to smell of it; the light tufts of white blossoms could still be seen in the transparent darkness. Another sweet odor besides rose from the gardens and yards, — that of the honeysuckles in bloom along the stone walls, — and also a faint smell of seaweed, from the harbor. Bats were gliding through the air, with their mysterious flight, like creatures of dreams.

Gaud had spent many an evening at this window, looking out into the melancholy square, dreaming of the absent Icelanders, and always of that same ball. . . .

It was very warm at the end of the ball, and many of the waltzers' heads began to whirl. She recalled how he danced with others, girls and women with whom he must have flirted more or less; she recalled the disdainful condescension with which he replied to their remarks. . . . How different he had been with them! . . .

He was a charming dancer, erect as a forest oak, throwing back his head, and turning with a light and noble grace. His brown curly hair fell slightly over his forehead and moved in the breeze made by the dancing; Gaud, who was quite tall, felt it brush against her cap when he bent toward her, to support her better during the quick waltzes.

From time to time he pointed out his little sister Marie and Sylvestre, the two lovers, who were

dancing together. He laughed good-naturedly to see these two young people so reserved together, bowing to each other, looking timidly at each other as they spoke very low, evidently saying very sweet things. Assuredly he would not have allowed it to be otherwise; but all the same it amused him, who had become so roving and enterprising, to see them so innocent. He then exchanged smiles of secret intelligence with Gaud, as if to say, —

"How pretty and funny they look, *our* little brother and sister!"

There was a great deal of embracing at the end of the ball: cousins kissed each other; those who were betrothed kissed each other; lovers kissed each other, — all in a hearty, frank, proper manner before everybody. Of course he did not kiss her; it would not have been allowable to kiss the daughter of Monsieur Mével; possibly he drew her a little closer to him during the last waltz and she made no resistance, but, on the contrary, confidingly allowed it, yielding herself to him with all her heart. In this sudden, profound, delicious infatuation, which carried her away entirely, the senses of a girl of twenty counted for something; but it was her heart which gave her the first impulse.

"Have you seen how that bold-faced girl looks at him?" asked two or three young beauties, with their eyes modestly cast down under light or dark lashes, and who had one lover at least, and perhaps two,

among the dancers. She really did look at him a great deal; but she had this excuse, that he was the first, the only young man to whom she had ever paid any attention in her life.

When they parted in the morning, after all had gone in confusion, in the cold, early dawn, they said good-bye in a different fashion, like two lovers who expected to meet again the next day. Then, on her way home, she had crossed this same square with her father, not at all weary, feeling lively and joyous, glad to be alive, loving the icy fog outside and the melancholy dawn, finding everything exquisitely delightful.

The May night had long since fallen; the windows had all been closed, one after another, with little sounds of grating bolts. Gaud still remained where she was, leaving hers open. The few last passers-by, distinguishing the white form of her head-dress, must have said, —

"There is a girl who is surely dreaming of her lover."

And it was true, she was dreaming of him, — longing to weep; her little white teeth bit her lips and constantly effaced the crease which underlined the lower contour of her sweet mouth. And her eyes remained fixed in the darkness, paying no heed to the objects before her.

"But after the ball, why did he not come back?"

What had changed him? Whenever they met by chance he seemed to avoid her, turning away his eyes, the motions of which were always so rapid.

She had often talked the matter over with Sylvestre, who could not understand it any better.

"Nevertheless, he is the one you ought to marry, Gaud," he would say, "if your father would allow it; for you will not find another equal to him in the whole country. In the first place, I tell you, he is very good, if he does n't seem to be so; he very rarely gets intoxicated. He is sometimes a little obstinate; but at heart he is perfectly gentle. No, you cannot imagine how good he is. And what a sailor! Every fishing season the captains quarrel to see which shall have him. . . ."

She was sure of obtaining her father's permission, for her wishes had never been denied. It made no difference to her that he was not rich. For such a sailor as he was, a little money in advance would be enough to give him six months' experience in the coasting service, and he would become a captain, to whom all the shipowners would be ready to intrust their vessels.

Neither did she care that he was something of a giant; to have too much strength might be objectionable in a woman, but in a man it was not a hindrance to beauty.

She found out, without apparently trying to do so, from the young girls in the region, who knew about

all the love-affairs, that he had never been known to have any attachment; without seeming to care for one more than another, he went about right and left, in Lézardrieux as well as Paimpol, with the pretty girls who were after him.

One Sunday evening, very late, she had seen him pass under her windows, walking very close together with a certain Jeannie Caroff, who was decidedly pretty, but whose reputation was very bad. This, indeed, had given her a cruel pain.

She had also been assured that he had a very violent temper; that one evening when he was intoxicated in a certain café in Paimpol, where the Icelanders hold their festivals, he had thrown a large marble table through a door that they had been unwilling to open for him. . . .

All this she could forgive: every one knows how it is with sailors sometimes when they get angry. But if he had an honest heart, why had he paid her such attention, only to desert her afterward; why had he gazed at her all that night, with that handsome smile which seemed so frank, and why had he assumed that sweet voice to tell her confidences as if she were his betrothed? Now it was impossible for her to become attached to any one else, and to change. In this same country, when she was a little child, they used to tell her, when they wanted to scold her, that she was a naughty little girl, as stubborn as she could be; she still remained so;

although now a handsome young lady, rather serious and haughty in her bearing, which no one had trained, she remained exactly the same in reality.

After that ball, she had passed the previous winter in the expectation of seeing him again, and he had not even come to say good-bye before his departure for Iceland. Now that he was gone, there was nothing left for her; the time seemed to drag slowly until the return in the autumn for which she had formed plans of having a clear explanation and putting an end to the matter. The hour of eleven sounded from the clock on the town-hall, with the peculiar tone that bells have in the calm nights of spring.

In Paimpol, eleven o'clock is very late; so Gaud closed her window, and lighted her lamp to go to bed. . . .

With regard to Yann, perhaps it was only timidity; or, as he too was proud, could it be fear of being refused, thinking her too rich? . . . She had already wanted to ask him herself, quite simply, but Sylvestre had thought it impossible; that it would not do at all for a young girl to appear so bold. In Paimpol, her manner and dress were already the subject of criticism. . . .

She took off her garments deliberately and absent-mindedly, like a young girl lost in dreams: first her muslin cap, then her elegant dress, made in city style, and which she threw carelessly over a chair.

Then her long corsets, which made people talk, on account of her Parisian figure. Her form, once free, became more perfect: no longer restrained or drawn in at the waist, it assumed its natural lines, which were as full and gentle as those of a marble statue; her motions varied their appearance, and each one of her attitudes was exquisite to see.

The little lamp, the only one burning at this late hour, cast a mysterious light over her shoulders and bosom, her admirable form which no eye had ever rested upon, and which would probably be lost to all, and shrivel up without ever being seen, since Yann did not care about it. . . .

She knew that she had a pretty face, but she was entirely unconscious of the beauty of her form. Moreover, in this region of Brittany, this beauty among the daughters of the Iceland fishermen is almost universal; it is never noticed, and even those among them who are not very modest, instead of making a parade of it, would be ashamed to let it be seen. No; it is the refined in the cities who attach so much importance to these things that they have them modelled and painted. . . .

She began to unfasten the coils of hair which were rolled above her ears, and the two braids fell over her back like two heavy serpents. She put them up in a crown on the top of her head, — to be more comfortable for sleeping, — then, with her regular profile, she looked like a Roman virgin.

However, her arms remained lifted, and still biting her lip, she continued twisting the blond tresses in her fingers, — like a child spoiling some plaything, while thinking of something else; then, letting them fall down again, she began quickly to undo them, for her own amusement and to loosen them; she was soon covered to her hips, looking like some forest druid.

Then, overcome with sleep, in spite of love and her desire to weep, she suddenly threw herself on the bed, hiding her face in the silky mass of her hair, which was now spread out like a veil.

In her cottage in Ploubazlanec, Grandmother Moan, who was on the darker side of life, was also sleeping at last the frigid sleep of old age, and dreaming of her grandson and death.

At the same hour, on board the *Marie*, — on that Northern sea, which was very rough that night, — Yann and Sylvestre, the two loved ones, were singing songs, while gayly fishing in that endless daylight.

## VI.

. . . . . .

*About a month later — In June.*

Around Iceland they were having the rare weather which the sailors call a *white* calm; that is, when nothing stirs in the air, as if all the breezes had been exhausted, had come to an end.

The sky was covered with a thick white veil, which grew dark down toward the horizon, changing to lead-color and the dull shades of tin. And beneath, the motionless waters reflected a pale, dazzling light, tiresome to the eyes and cold.

Just at this moment there were ripples, nothing but changing ripples playing over the sea, — very light rings, such as are made by blowing on a mirror. The whole shining expanse seemed covered with a network of vague designs, interlacing and changing shape; quickly effaced, very fleeting.

Endless evening or endless morning, it was impossible to tell which: a sun indicating no particular hour was always there, presiding over this resplendence of lifeless things; it was only another circle itself, almost without shape, exaggerated to an immense size by a thick halo.

Yann and Sylvestre, fishing side by side, were singing "Jean-François de Nantes," that endless song amusing themselves with its very monotony, and looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes and laughing at the sort of childish drollery with which they continually repeated the couplets, trying to put new life into them every time. Their cheeks glowed in the clear, fresh salt atmosphere. The air they breathed was pure and invigorating; they filled their lungs with it, at the very source of all vigor and all life.

And yet around them there was every appearance

of a lack of life, of a world that was dead or not yet created. The light had no warmth; everything was motionless and as if frozen forever under the gaze of that great spectral eye, the sun.

The *Marie* cast on the expanse of waters a shadow as long as the evening, and which looked green in the midst of the polished surface reflecting the whiteness of the sky. Then in this shadow, which did not reflect, one could distinguish through the transparence what was going on under the water, — innumerable fishes, myriads and myriads, all alike, gently gliding in the same direction, as if they had the same aim in their perpetual voyage. They were codfish, executing their evolutions together, all following along in parallel lines, giving the effect of gray hatchings, moving ceaselessly with a rapid trembling, which gave an appearance of fluidity to this mass of silent lines. Occasionally, with a sudden flap of their tails, they would all turn at the same time, showing the brilliancy of their silvery bellies; and then the same flapping of their tails and the same turning about would spread throughout the entire school in slow undulations, as if thousands of metal blades had flashed simultaneously between two sheets of water.

The sun, already very low, was still declining, so it was decidedly evening. As it went down into the lead-colored zones next the sea, it grew yellow, and its circle was more clearly defined, more real. One could look at it as at the moon.

It shone, but it did not look as if it were far distant in space; it seemed as if by going with a ship merely to the edge of the horizon one might reach this great melancholy balloon floating in the air a few yards above the water.

The fishing went on rapidly. Looking down into the quiet water, one could easily see how it was done: the codfish came to bite with gluttonous avidity, then shook themselves when they felt pricked, as if to get a better hold. Then continually, quickly, with both hands, the fishermen drew in their lines, throwing the fish to the man who cleaned and spread them.

The little fleet from Paimpol was scattered over this tranquil mirror, giving life to the desert waters. Here and there appeared little distant sails, hoisted as usual, although there was no breeze stirring, and very white, standing out clearly against the gray of the horizon.

On this day the life of the Iceland fishermen seemed so quiet, so easy, — a young lady's life.

. . . . . .

"Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!"

They were singing like two big children.

And Yann little cared that he was so handsome and had such a noble bearing. Moreover, he was a

child only with Sylvestre, never singing or playing with any one else. With others, on the contrary, he was reserved, and, if anything, proud and gloomy, very gentle when any one required his services, always kind and willing when he was not irritated.

They were singing their song while the two others, a few steps away, were singing something else, — another chant, made up of drowsiness, sound health, and vague melancholy.

Their work was not irksome, and the time passed.

Below in the cabin there was always a fire in the iron stove; and the door of the hatchway was now closed to make it dark for those who needed sleep. They required very little air when they were asleep. Less robust people, brought up in the city, would have needed more. But when the lungs are deeply inflated all day with the same boundless air, they too go to sleep afterward, and hardly move; then one can curl up in any kind of a hole, as the animals do.

They went to bed after their watch whenever they chose, at any time, fixed hours being of no importance in this perpetual daylight; and they always slept an undisturbed, dreamless sleep.

If they happened to think of the women, it disturbed their rest; if they could say that in six weeks the fishing would be over, and that they would soon be with their loved ones, they would not be able to close their eyes.

. . . . . .

"Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!"

Now they were looking at something almost imperceptible, far away on the gray horizon, — a little smoke, rising above the water, like a microscopic tail, of a different gray, a very little darker than that of the sky. With their eyes trained to sound the depths, they had quickly noticed it: —

"A steamer, yonder!"

"I think," said the captain, taking a good look at it, — "I think it is the government steamer, the cruiser, going on its round. . . ."

This indistinct smoke was bringing to the fishermen news of France, and among others, a certain letter from an old grandmother written by the hand of a pretty young girl.

It approached slowly; soon its black hull came into sight, — it was really the cruiser, coming to make the tour of these western fiords.

At the same time, a light sharp breeze which had sprung up was beginning to ruffle the surface of the water in places; it traced on the shining mirror designs of a bluish green, stretching out in tracks, spreading out like fans, or branching in the shape of madrepores; this came up very suddenly with a murmuring, like a sign of awakening life, foretelling the end of this vast torpidity. The sky, freed from its veil, became clear; the mists, swept back on the

horizon, were heaped up in masses of gray down, like walls of softness around the sea. The two endless mirrors between which the sailors were — the one above and the other below — took on once more their look of deep transparence, as if the steam which dimmed them had been wiped away. The weather was changing, but too rapidly to be favorable.

From different points on the sea, from different directions on this vast expanse, came the fishing vessels: all those from France, which were roaming about in these quarters; from Brittany, Normandy, Boulogne, or Dunkerque. Like birds flocking together at a call, they collected in the wake of the cruiser; they even came from the empty corners of the horizon, and their little gray wings appeared everywhere. They entirely peopled the pale desert.

No longer slowly drifting, they spread their sails in the fresh young breeze, and approached with all possible speed.

Iceland, too, appeared in the distance, as if it would like to come near with the rest; more and more clearly showed its lofty mountains of bare rocks, — which have never been lighted except on one side, from underneath and begrudgingly, as it were. It was extended by a second Iceland of like color, which gradually became accentuated; but this was chimerical, and its more gigantic mountains were only a condensation of vapors. The sun, ever low and lingering, unable to rise on high, looked

through this island of fancy in such a way as to seem as if it were in front of it, and the effect was incomprehensible. Its halo had disappeared; the outline of its round disk having become very distinct, it seemed like some poor, yellow, dying planet, which had come to a standstill there, undecided in the midst of chaos. . . .

The cruiser, which had stopped, was now surrounded by the Iceland pleiads. From all these vessels, boats like nutshells had come, bringing on board rough men with long beards in barbarous costumes.

They all had something to ask for, almost like children, — remedies for slight wounds, mending materials, provisions, letters.

Others came from their captains to be put in irons, as punishment for some unruliness; as they had all been in the service of the government, it seemed to them a matter of course. And when the narrow lower deck of the cruiser was filled with four or five of these tall fellows, stretched out with their feet in rings, the old mate who had padlocked them would say, —

"Lie crosswise, boys, to let people pass," — and they willingly did it with a smile.

There were a great many letters this time for the Icelanders. Among others, two for the *Marie, Captain Guermeur*, one for *Monsieur Yann Gaos*, the

other for *Monsieur Sylvestre Moan* (the latter having come by the *Danemark* to Reikiawik, where it was taken by the cruiser). The purser, taking them out of his canvas bag, distributed them, often having some difficulty in reading the addresses, which were not all written by practised hands.

And the commander said, —

"Hurry up, hurry up! the barometer is falling."

He felt somewhat anxious at seeing all these little shells on the water, and so many fishermen collected in this uncertain region.

Yann and Sylvestre were in the habit of reading their letters together.

This time it was by the midnight sun, which shone just above the horizon with the same appearance of a dead planet.

Sitting together by themselves in a corner on the deck, with their arms around each other's shoulders, they read very slowly, as if to get a better understanding of the news about their country.

In Yann's letter, Sylvestre found news of Marie Gaos, his little sweetheart; in Sylvestre's letter, Yann read the funny stories told by Grandmother Yvonne, who had no equal for amusing those away from home; then the last paragraph, which concerned him:

"My greeting to son Gaos."

Having finished reading the letters, Sylvestre timidly showed his to his big friend, to try to make him appreciate the handwriting: —

"See, is n't that pretty writing, Yann?"

But Yann, knowing very well what the young girl's hand was, turned away his head with a shrug of his shoulders, as if he were tired to death of this Gaud.

Then Sylvestre carefully folded the poor little disdained paper, replaced it in the envelope, and put it in his jacket next his heart, thinking very sadly to himself, —

"Surely they will never be married; . . . but what can he have against her? . . ."

The midnight bell sounded from the cruiser; and they still remained sitting where they were, thinking of home, of absent ones, of a thousand things in their dream. . . .

At this moment, the ever-present sun, which had just dipped its edge in the water, began to rise slowly.

And it was morning.

## PART SECOND.

### I.

THE Iceland sun had changed its appearance and its color, and this new day opened with a threatening morning. Entirely free from its veil, the sun sent forth great rays, crossing the sky like jets, announcing that bad weather was near at hand.

For the last few days it had been too beautiful to last. The breeze blew over this gathering of boats, as if it felt the need of scattering them, — of clearing the sea; and they began to disperse, to flee like a routed army, — before this threat which was written in the air, and could not be mistaken.

It blew still stronger, making the men and the vessels shiver. The waves, still small, were beginning to run after one another, and gather in groups; at first they were capped with white foam, which spread out on the top in ridges; then with a hissing it began to steam; it seemed as if it were cooking, burning; and the piercing noise of all this increased from minute to minute.

They no longer thought of the fishing, but only of managing the vessels. The lines had long since been hauled in. They were all hastening away; some trying to reach the shelter of the fiords in time, others

preferring to pass the southern point of Iceland, considering it safer to take to the open sea, and to have free space ahead of them to run before the wind. They could still see something of one another; here and there in the trough of the sea, the sails, poor little wet, tired, retreating things, were tossing up and down, but keeping upright like the children's toys made of pith, which are easily blown over, but always right themselves again.

The great wall of clouds, which had been collected on the western horizon, with the appearance of an island, was now scattering overhead, and fragments were flying over the sky. This wall seemed inexhaustible! the wind spread it, stretched it out, extended it indefinitely, bringing out dark curtains which it unrolled in the bright yellow sky, now becoming cold, livid, and lowering.

The mighty wind, agitating everything, grew stronger and stronger.

The cruiser had gone to seek the protection of Iceland; the fishermen remained alone on this angry sea, which was taking on a look of evil omen and a frightful color. They hurried to prepare for foul weather. The distance between the vessels increased; they would soon be lost to sight of one another.

The waves, ruffled into volutes, continued to chase one another, to mingle, to clutch one another, and grow higher and higher, making deep valleys between them.

In a few hours, everything was ploughed up and agitated in this region, so calm the day before, and instead of the former silence, the noise was deafening. What a change of scene, all this involuntary, useless commotion, which had taken place so quickly! What could be the object of it all? What a mystery of blind destruction!

The clouds went on unrolling in the air, still coming from the west, piling themselves up, hurrying, swift, obscuring everything. A few yellow rents remained, through which the sun sent down its last rays in sheaves. And the water, now of a greenish color, became more and more streaked with white foam.

By noon, the *Marie* was wholly prepared for bad weather; her hatchways closed and her sails reefed, she bounded supple and light; in the midst of the commotion now beginning, she seemed to be at play, like big porpoises who enjoy a tempest. With only a fore-sail she "scud before the gale," according to the nautical expression descriptive of this trim.

Overhead, it had grown completely dark, a closed oppressive vault, with a few blacker, smutty places spread over it in shapeless blotches; it seemed almost like an immovable dome, and it was necessary to watch it closely to realize that, on the contrary, it was in a whirl of motion, — great gray sheets, hurrying along, ceaselessly replaced by others coming from

the edge of the horizon; tapestries of darkness, unwinding as from an endless roll. . . .

She fled before the weather, the *Marie;* fled faster and faster, — and the weather was fleeing too, — before some strange, terrible mystery. The wind, the sea, the *Marie*, the clouds, all seemed impelled by the same infatuation of flight and swiftness in the same direction. The wind was hurrying away with the greatest rapidity; then the great billows rising, more heavily, more slowly, running after it; then the *Marie*, carried away in the general flight. The waves pursued her with their white crests, rolling over one another in a perpetual cataract, and she — always overtaken, always left behind — escaped them, nevertheless, by means of a skilful furrow which she made in her wake, by a dead-water where their fury was spent.

What impressed one most in this motion of flight was an illusion of lightness; without any trouble or effort, she seemed to bound along. When the *Marie* rose on the waves, it was without any shock, as if the wind lifted her; and her descent after was like sliding, causing the same sinking sensation in the stomach that one feels in the simulated slides of "Russian cars" or in the imaginary falls in dreams. She glided backwards as it were, the fleeing mountain slipping away from under her, on its onward course, and then she was plunged again into one of those great hollows, which also hurried away; with-

out harm, she touched the horrible bottom, in a splashing of water which did not even wet her, but which was fleeing like all the rest; which fled away and vanished before her like smoke, like nothing. . . .

In the depths of these hollows it was darker, and after each wave that passed, another was seen coming behind; the other still larger, rising all green through its transparency; hastening to approach, with furious contortions, volutes ready to close, seeming to say, —

"Wait till I catch you, and I will swallow you up."

But no; it only lifted you up, as a shrug of the shoulders lifts a feather; and almost gently you felt it pass under you, with its hissing foam, its roar like a cataract.

And so on continually. But it kept increasing. The waves succeeded one another, more and more enormous, in long mountain ranges, and the valleys between began to be frightful. And all this madness of motion was accelerated, under a sky growing darker and darker, in the midst of a noise more and more tremendous.

It was assuredly very foul weather, and it was necessary to be on the watch. But they had so much free space before them, so much room to run in! And then the *Marie* this year had spent the season in the most western part of the Iceland fish-

eries; so that all this race toward the east was so much gained on their journey home.

Yann and Sylvestre were at the helm, lashed around the waist. They were still singing the song of "Jean-François de Nantes;" intoxicated by the motion and speed, they were singing at the top of their voices, laughing at no longer being able to hear themselves amid all this outburst of noises, and amusing themselves by turning their heads to sing against the wind and losing their breath.

"Well, children, does it smell close up there?" asked Guermeur, putting his bearded face through the half-open hatchway, like a jack ready to come out of his box.

Oh, no, it certainly did n't smell close.

They had no fear, knowing exactly what they had to deal with, having confidence in their boat and in the strength of their arms; and also in the protection of the faïence Virgin, who, for forty years of voyages to Iceland, had danced so many times this same evil dance, always smiling among her bouquets of artificial flowers. . . .

"Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!"

For the most part, they could not see far around them; a few hundred metres away, everything seemed to end in a kind of vague apprehension, in pallid crests bristling up and shutting in the scene.

They seemed to be always in the centre of a limited, although perpetually changing scene; and, moreover, everything was bathed in a sort of watery smoke, which passed in a cloud, with extreme swiftness, over the surface of the sea.

But, from time to time, a clear spot appeared toward the northwest, from whence a shifting of the wind might come; then a light appeared on the edge of the horizon, a lingering reflection, making the dome of the sky seem darker, spread over the agitated white crests. And this clear spot was melancholy to behold; these distant glimpses, these vistas, were more depressing because they made it plain that there was the same chaos everywhere, the same madness, — even behind the wide, empty horizon and infinitely beyond: the horror was boundless, and they were alone in the midst.

A gigantic clamor sounded everywhere, like an apocalyptical prelude threatening the frightful end of the world. In it thousands of voices were distinguished; from above, came whistling or deep voices, which seemed almost far away on account of being so vast: this was the wind, the great soul of this commotion, the invisible power threatening everything. It was terrible, but there were other noises, nearer, more material, menacing destruction, made by the water tossing and seething, as if hot coals were underneath.

This was continually increasing in force.

And, in spite of their flight, the sea was beginning to cover them, to *swallow* them, as they said; at first the spray lashing the stern, then the water hurled in quantities, with force enough to break everything. The waves grew higher and higher, more madly high, and yet they were cut up proportionally into great greenish fragments, which were formed by the falling water hurled in every direction by the wind. It fell in heavy masses on the deck, with a crash, and then the *Marie* would quiver all over, as if in pain. Nothing could be seen any longer, on account of all the white foam scattered about; as the squalls shrieked more loudly, it could be seen coming with a rush in thicker clouds, like dust on the roads in summer. A heavy rain, which had begun, was falling also slantingwise, horizontal, and everything together whistled, slashed, wounded like thongs.

They both remained at the helm, fastened and standing firm, dressed in oil-skins, which were as stiff and shiny as sharks' skins; they were well fastened with tarred cord at the neck, the wrists, and the ankles to keep out the water, and it ran over them, as they bent their backs when it fell more heavily, bracing themselves well in order not to be thrown over. The skin on their cheeks was burned, and their breath was taken away every moment. After each great mass of water fell, they looked at each other, smiling to see all the salt collected in their beards.

In the long run, this became extremely fatiguing, — this fury, which did not abate, but still continued in the same exasperated paroxysm. The rage of man, that of beasts, gets exhausted and is quickly spent; but that of inanimate things must be long, long endured, for it is causeless, aimless, as mysterious as life, as mysterious as death.

"Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François!"

The refrain of the old song still passed their now colorless lips, but like something soundless, repeated unconsciously from time to time. The excess of motion and noise had intoxicated them. Their youth was all in vain. Their smiles were grimaces, showing their teeth, which chattered with the cold; their eyes, half closed under their burned, blinking eyelids, stared in desperate feebleness. Riveted to their helm like two marble buttresses, with their blue, stiff hands they made the necessary efforts almost without thinking, from the simple habit of the muscles. With dripping hair and contracted mouths they looked strange, and in them reappeared a background of primitive savagery.

They no longer saw each other; they were only conscious of being still there, side by side. In the most dangerous moments, whenever behind them rose a new mountain of water, overhanging, roaring, horrible, striking their vessel with a great, heavy

crash, one of their hands would move involuntarily, making the sign of the Cross. They no longer thought of anything, — neither Gaud nor any woman, nor of marriage at all. This had lasted too long; they had no more thoughts. Drunk with noise, fatigue, and cold, everything was driven out of their heads; they were only two pillars of stiffened flesh holding the helm, two vigorous creatures held fast there by instinct in order that they might not die.

## II.

. . . . . .

It was in Brittany, after the middle of September, on a cool day. Gaud was walking all alone across the plain of Ploubazlanec, in the direction of Pors-Even.

The Iceland vessels had returned nearly a month before, — all but two, which had disappeared in that gale in June. But the *Marie* having held her own, Yann and all on board were safe on shore.

Gaud was feeling very much agitated at the prospect of going to Yann's house.

She had seen him just once since his return from Iceland; that was when they had all gone together to see Sylvestre off for the service. (They had accompanied him to the stage. He wept a little, and his old grandmother wept a great deal; and he went away to join the troops in Brest.) Yann, who had also come to say good-bye to his little friend, had

pretended to turn his eyes away whenever she looked at him; and as there were a great many people around the carriage, — other recruits going away, with their relatives assembled to bid them farewell, — there was no opportunity for speaking to each other.

Then she finally made a great resolution, and, somewhat timid, was going to the Gaoses' house.

Her father had formerly had some interests in common with Yann, — some complicated business, such as among fishermen as well as among peasants never comes to an end, — and owed him a hundred francs for his share in the sale of a boat which had just taken place.

"You ought to let me carry this money to him, father," she had said. "I should like to see Marie Gaos; and then I have never been so far in Ploubazlanec, and it would interest me to take the long walk."

In reality, she felt an anxious curiosity about Yann's family, the house, and the village, to which she might possibly belong some day.

In the last talk she had with Sylvestre before he went away, he had given his own explanation of his friend's strange behavior: —

"You see, Gaud, it is like this: he has an idea that he doesn't want to marry any one. He loves only the sea; and he even told us one day, jokingly, that he had promised to marry the sea."

So she forgave his manner toward her, and, still recalling his lovely, frank smile that night of the ball, she began once more to hope.

If she should meet him at his house, she would certainly not say anything to him; she had no intention of seeming so bold. But he, perhaps, seeing her so near, might possibly speak himself. . . .

## III.

She walked for an hour, quickly, anxiously breathing in the healthful air from the sea.

There were large crucifixes set up at the cross-ways.

Here and there she passed through little maritime settlements, which are beaten by the wind all the year, and the color of which is like the rocks. In one, where the path suddenly grew narrower between dark walls and high thatched roofs, like Celtic huts, the sign on a tavern made her smile, — "Chinese cider;" and on it were painted two grotesque figures with pig-tails, in pink and green dresses, drinking cider. Without doubt it was the fancy of some old sailor who had been in that country. As she went along, she saw everything. People who are very much absorbed by the object of their journey are always more amused than others by the thousand details on the way.

The little village was now far behind her; and, as she approached the last promontory of Brittany, the trees became more and more infrequent around her, the country more dreary.

The land was undulating, rocky, and from every height there was a view of the wide sea. There were no trees at all now; nothing but the bare moorland, with its green furze, and here and there the sacred crucifixes standing out against the sky with their long arms, giving to the whole country the appearance of an immense Golgotha.

At one crossway, guarded by one of these enormous Christs, she hesitated between two roads which ran among thorny slopes.

A little girl appeared, just in time to help her out of her embarrassment.

"Good-afternoon, Mademoiselle Gaud!"

It was one of the little Gaos children, a sister of Yann's. After kissing her, she asked if the family were at home.

"Papa and mamma, yes. Only my brother Yann," said the little girl, without any malice, "has gone to Loguivy; but I think he will not be gone late."

He was not there! Again the same ill luck which separated him from her everywhere and always. She thought seriously of deferring her visit until another time; but this little girl, who had seen her on the way, would tell about it. . . . What would people think of that in Pors-Even? So she decided to go

on, loitering as much as possible, in order to give him time to return.

As she approached this village of Yann's, this out-of-the-way place, everything became more and more rough and desolate. The strong wind from the sea, which made men stronger, made the plants low, short, stunted, flattened out on the hard soil. Seaweed trailed over the path, foliage from yonder indicating that another world was near at hand. It diffused its saline odor through the air.

Gaud occasionally met passers-by, — seafaring people, who could be seen a long way off in this bare country, standing out, as if magnified, against the high distant line of the water. Whether pilots or fishermen, they all had the appearance of being on the look-out, of watching over the sea; as they met her, they greeted her. Sunburned faces, very manly and decided under their sailor caps.

The time made no progress, and she really did not know what to do to lengthen out her journey; these people looked surprised to see her walking so slowly.

What could Yann be doing in Loguivy? He was flirting with the girls, perhaps. . . .

Oh, if she had known how little he cared for pretty girls! If he happened to take a fancy to one of them, he usually had only to be presented. The young girls of Paimpol, as the old Iceland song says, are a little free in their ways, and could not resist a handsome fellow like him. No; he had

simply gone to make some purchases of a certain basket-maker in that village, who was the only one in all the region who understood plaiting lobster-traps properly. His head was entirely free from love at this time.

She came to a chapel, which could be seen from a distance on a height. It was a very small, very old gray chapel; in the midst of the baldness all about, a group of trees, also gray and already without leaves, formed the hair, — hair all thrown on the same side, as if a hand had been passed over it.

And this hand was the same that made the fishermen's boats capsize, — the everlasting hand of the west winds which bend the twisted branches on the shore, away from the waves and billows. The old trees had grown crooked and dishevelled, bending their backs under the primeval strength of this same hand.

Gaud found herself almost at her journey's end, for this was the chapel of Pors-Even; so she stopped there to pass away the time.

A little crumbling wall surrounded an enclosure filled with crosses. Everything was of the same color, — the chapel, the trees, and the tombstones. The whole place seemed uniformly sunburned, eaten into by the wind from the sea; the same gray moss, with spots of pale sulphur yellow, covered the stones, the gnarled branches, and the granite saints standing in niches of the wall.

On one of the wooden crosses, a name was written in large letters: *Gaos, — Gaos Joël, eighty years.*

Ah! yes, the grandfather; she knew that. The sea had no longer desired this old mariner. By the way, many of Yann's relatives must be sleeping in this enclosure, of course, and it would have been natural to linger there; but this name, as she read it on the gravestone, impressed her painfully.

In order to pass away a little more time, she went in to say a prayer in the antique whitewashed porch, which was very small and worn. But there she stopped, her heart still more oppressed.

*Gaos!* Again this name, engraved on one of the funeral tablets such as are put up to preserve the memory of those who have died at sea.

She began to read this inscription: —

In memory of
Gaos, Jean-Louis,
Aged twenty-four years, a sailor on board the *Marguérite*,
lost in Iceland, the 3d of August, 1877.
May he rest in peace!

Iceland, — always Iceland! At the entrance of this chapel, slabs of wood with the names of deceased sailors were fastened up everywhere. It was the corner devoted to the shipwrecked sailors belonging to Pors-Even; and, feeling a dark presentiment, she regretted that she had come there. In the church at Paimpol, she had seen similar inscriptions; but here in this village the empty tombs of the Iceland

fishermen were smaller, more defaced, ruder. On each side there was a stone seat for the widows and mothers; and this low, irregular place, like a grotto, was watched over by a very ancient Holy Virgin, painted pink, with great evil eyes like those of Cybele, the primitive goddess of the earth.

Gaos! Again!

In memory of
Gaos, François,
husband of Anne-Marie Le Goaster,
Captain of the *Paimpolais*,
lost in Iceland, about the first or 3d of April, 1877,
with twenty-three men composing his crew.
May they rest in peace!

And below, two cross-bones under a black skull with green eyes, — an ingenious, ghastly picture, suggesting the barbarism of a bygone age.

Gaos! This name was everywhere!

Another Gaos, called Yves, *lost overboard and disappeared somewhere near the Norden-Fiord, in Iceland, at the age of twenty-two years.* The tablet seemed to have been there for long years; he must have been quite forgotten. . . .

As she read, a burst of sweet tenderness, with a touch of despair as well, came over her for Yann. Never, never, would he be hers! How could she contend for him with the sea, when so many other Gaoses had gone down in it, — his ancestors, his brothers, who must have borne a strong resemblance to him.

She went into the chapel, already dark, imperfectly lighted by low windows in the thick walls. And there, with her heart full of tears ready to fall, she knelt down to pray before the saints; and such enormous saints, surrounded with coarse flowers, and touching the ceiling with their heads! Outside the wind, which had arisen, was beginning to moan, as if bringing back to Brittany the complaint of the young men who had died.

Evening was coming on; she must decide to make her visit and accomplish her errand.

She went on her way, and, after inquiring in the village, she found the Gaoses' house, which stood against a high cliff; it was reached by a dozen stone steps. Trembling a little at the thought that Yann might have returned, she crossed the garden, where the chrysanthemums and veronicas were in bloom.

As she entered, she said that she had brought the money from the sale of the boat, and they asked her very politely to sit down and wait until their father's return, when he would sign the receipt for her. Among all the people there her eyes looked for Yann, but she did not see him.

They were very busy in the house. On a large, very white table, they were cutting out from a piece of new cotton the garments called oil-skins, for the next season in Iceland.

"You see, Mademoiselle Gaud, each one has to have two complete changes to use out there."

They explained to her how these garments of poverty were afterward painted and waxed. And while they were giving her these details, her eyes were carefully scrutinizing this home of the Gaos family.

It was arranged in the traditional manner of Breton cottages, — an immense fireplace occupied the back, and press-beds, one above another, on the sides. But this one was neither so dark nor so gloomy as farmers' houses, which are always half-buried by the side of the roads; it was light and clean, as is common among seafaring people.

Several little Gaoses were there, boys or girls: all of Yann's brothers and sisters, except two grown up and away at sea; and, besides, a very fair-haired, melancholy, tidy little girl, who did not at all resemble the others.

"A little girl we adopted last year," the mother explained. "We already had a great many; but what could we do, Mademoiselle Gaud? Her father was on the *Maria Dieu-t'aime*, which was lost in Iceland last season, as you know; then the five children who were left were divided among the neighbors, and this one fell to our share."

Hearing them talk about her, the little adopted child hung down her head and smiled, taking refuge beside little Laumec Gaos, who was her favorite.

There was an air of comfort everywhere about the house, and the fresh bloom of health on all the rosy cheeks of the children.

They received Gaud with great cordiality, — as a fine young lady, whose visit was an honor to the family. They took her up the new white wooden staircase to the room above, which was the glory of the house. She remembered very well the history of building this story: it was in consequence of a treasure-trove in the shape of an abandoned boat, found by Father Gaos and his cousin the pilot in the Channel; Yann had told her about it that night of the ball.

This room, resulting from the wreck, was pretty and cheerful in its perfectly new whiteness: there were two beds in it, in city fashion, with pink chintz curtains; a large table was in the centre of the room. From the window one could look all over Paimpol and the harbor, with the Iceland vessels riding at anchor there, and the Channel, through which they passed out to sea.

She did not dare to ask, but she would have liked to know where Yann slept; evidently, when a little child, he had slept downstairs in some one of those old-fashioned bunks; but now, perhaps, here behind the fine pink curtains. She would have liked to be familiar with all the details of his life, especially to know how he spent his long winter evenings.

A heavy step on the stairs startled her.

No; it was not Yann, but a man who, in spite of his white hair, resembled him, who was almost as tall and as erect as he, — Father Gaos returned from fishing.

After having greeted her and inquired the object of her visit, he signed the receipt, which took him some time, for his hand was no longer, he said, very steady. However, he did not accept these hundred francs as a final settlement, entirely clearing off the indebtedness, but in part payment; he would talk the matter over with M. Mével. Gaud, who cared little for money, smiled imperceptibly. Very good, then, the matter had not yet come to an end; moreover, it would necessitate further intercourse with the Gaos family.

They almost apologized for Yann's absence from home, as if they would have considered it more polite to have the whole family assembled to receive her. Possibly the father had divined, with the shrewdness of an old sailor, that his son was not a matter of indifference to this fine heiress; for he persisted in talking about him:—

"It is very surprising," he said; "he is never out so late. He has gone to Loguivy, Mademoiselle Gaud, to buy lobster-traps; as you know, it is our great winter's catch."

She was entertained, and prolonged her visit with the consciousness that she was staying too late, and feeling downhearted at the thought of not seeing him.

"What can a good fellow like him be doing? He is certainly not at the tavern; we have nothing to fear in that direction from our son. I do not say

that once in a great while, on Sunday, with his companions — you know, Mademoiselle Gaud, how sailors — well, dear me, when a man is young, why should he abstain entirely? But it is very rare with him. He is a good boy; we can say that."

However, night was coming on. The oil-skins they had begun were folded up, and work was suspended. The little Gaos children and the little adopted girl, feeling the sadness of the gloomy twilight, were sitting closely together on the benches, and, looking at Gaud, seeming to ask, —

"Now why does n't she go?"

In the fireplace the fire was beginning to shine red in the gathering twilight.

"You must stay and have soup with us, Mademoiselle Gaud."

Oh, no, she could not do that! The color mounted suddenly to her face at the thought of having stayed so late. She rose, and took her leave.

Yann's father rose also to go with her a part of the way, as far as a certain lonely lowland, where some old trees made the path dark.

As they were walking side by side, a feeling of respect and tenderness for him came over her. She had sudden impulses of longing to speak to him as to a father; but the words stopped in her throat, and she said nothing.

They went along in the cold evening wind, which smelled of the sea, passing here and there on the

bare moor cottages already closed for the night, — very dark under their humpbacked roofs, poor nests where the fishermen had retreated, — passing the crosses, the sea-rushes, and the rocks.

How far away this Pors-Even seemed, and how late she was!

Occasionally they met people returning from Paimpol or Loguivy. As she saw these silhouettes of men approach, she thought each time of Yann; but he was easily recognized at a distance, and she was always disappointed. Her feet tripped in long brown plants, tangled like hair; they were seaweed, trailing on the ground.

At the cross of Plouëzoc'h she bade the old man good-night, begging him to go back. She could already see the lights in Paimpol, and there was nothing more to be afraid of.

Well, it was all over this time. . . . And who could tell when she would see Yann? . . .

She could find excuses enough for going to Pors-Even again, but it would not look well for her to repeat the visit. She must have more self-control and more pride. If only Sylvestre, her little confidant, had been still there, perhaps she would have commissioned him to go to Yann in her behalf to get an explanation from him; but he had gone away, — and for how many years? . . .

## IV.

"MARRY?" said Yann to his parents that evening. "I marry? Well, why in the world should I do that? Should I ever be as happy as I am here with you, — no care, no quarrelling, and good hot soup every night when I come home from the sea? . . . Oh, I understand well enough that you are thinking about the girl who has been here at the house to-day. In the first place, what a person as rich as she is wants of poor people like us is not at all clear to my mind. No, I shall never marry her or any one else; I have thought it all over, and this is my decision."

The two old people looked at each other in silence. They were deeply disappointed; for, after talking the matter over together, they felt very sure that this young girl would not refuse their handsome Yann. But they did not attempt to urge the matter, knowing how useless it would be. His mother bent her head without saying a word; she respected the wishes of this eldest son of hers, who was almost the head of the family. Although he was always very gentle and tender with her, more submissive than a child in the little affairs of life, he had for a long time been absolute master in important ones, resisting all persuasion with a fiercely calm independence.

He never stayed up late, because, like the other fishermen, he was in the habit of rising before day-

light. After supper, about eight o'clock, having given a last look of satisfaction at his traps from Loguivy, and his new nets, he began to undress, apparently very calm in his mind. Then he went upstairs to sleep in the bed with the pink chintz curtains, which he shared with his little brother Laumec.

## V.

For two weeks Sylvestre, Gaud's little confidant, had been in quarters at Brest, — very homesick, but very good, proudly wearing his open blue collar and cap with its red rosette, a superb specimen of a sailor, with his rolling gait and tall figure, at heart always missing his good old grandmother, and remaining the same innocent child he had always been.

One night only he had been intoxicated, with the other fellows from his home, because it was the custom. A whole band of them had all come back to their quarters arm in arm, and singing enough to split their throats.

One Sunday, also, he had gone to the theatre, and sat in the upper gallery. They were playing one of those great dramas where the sailors, becoming exasperated with the villain, greet him with a *hou!* which they utter all together, making a loud noise like the west wind. Moreover, he found it very warm there, crowded together as they were, without any

air. An attempt to take off his coat brought him a reprimand from an officer.

And finally he fell asleep.

As he was returning to the barracks, past mid night, he met certain ladies of very ripe age, bare-headed, who were walking the streets.

"Look here, my fine fellow," they said in their coarse, raucous voices.

He understood at once what they wanted, for he was not so unsophisticated as might have been supposed. But the sudden recollection of his old grandmother and Marie Gaos made him pass scornfully by them, eying them from the loftiness of his youth and beauty with a smile of innocent mockery. The charmers were very much astonished at this sailor's reserve.

"Did you see that? . . . Take care! run away, my son: run away fast; you are going to be eaten up."

And the sound of the infamous things they shouted after him was lost amid the indefinite noises which filled the street that Sunday night.

He conducted himself in Brest as he did in Iceland, as he did on the ocean: he kept himself pure. But the others did not laugh at him, because he was very strong, and this inspires sailors with respect.

## VI.

One day he was called to headquarters; it was announced to him that he was to go to China, to join the squadron off Formosa.

He had for a long time suspected that this would happen, having heard those who read the newspapers say that the war over there had not come to an end. On account of the urgency of their departure, he was informed at the same time that they could not give him the leave of absence for saying his farewells, usually granted to those who were going on a campaign: in five days he must be ready to leave.

He felt extremely agitated: — on the one side, the fascinating prospect of long voyages, of the unknown, of war; on the other, the pain at leaving all, and the uncertainty of his return.

A thousand things were whirling around in his head. There was a great commotion about him in the barracks, where many others had also just been ordered to join the Chinese squadron.

And he wrote in haste to his poor old grandmother; he wrote in haste with a pencil, sitting on the ground, absorbed in an excited revery, in the midst of the coming and going and the noise of all these young men who, like himself, were so soon to depart.

## VII.

"SHE is rather ancient, this sweetheart of his!" said the others, two days later, laughing behind his back; "however, they seem to understand each other just the same."

They were amused to see him walking through the streets of Recouvrance for the first time, with a woman on his arm, like everybody else, bending toward her affectionately, and saying to her things which seemed to be very sweet.

A small person with quite a trim figure, when seen from behind, — her skirts a little short, perhaps, for the fashion of the day; a little brown shawl and a big Paimpol head-dress.

She also, leaning on his arm, leaned toward him with a look of tenderness.

"She is rather ancient, this sweetheart!"

They said this without any great malice, understanding that she was a good old grandmother, come from the country.

Come in haste, having been terribly alarmed by the news of her grandson's departure, — for this war in China had already cost the region of Paimpol many sailors.

Having collected all her poor little savings, put her best Sunday dress and a change of head-dresses in a pasteboard box, she had started off in order to kiss him at least once more.

She went straight to the barracks to inquire for him, and at first the adjutant of his company had refused to let him come out.

"If you want to see him, go, my good lady, and speak to the captain; there he goes now."

And she went directly to him. He was moved.

"Send Moan to change his clothes," said he.

And Moan went up four steps at a time, to put on his dress uniform; while the good old dame, for his amusement, made up an irresistible face and courtesied behind the adjutant's back.

Then, when her grandson appeared in his low-necked uniform, she was amazed to find him so handsome: his black beard had been cut, pointed by a barber, according to the fashion among sailors that year; the ruffles on his open shirt were fluted, and his cap had long floating ribbons, with gold anchors on the ends.

For a moment she fancied she saw her son Pierre, who, twenty years before, had also been topman in the fleet, and the recollection of the remote past, of all her deceased friends, furtively cast a melancholy shadow over the present hour.

Her sadness quickly disappeared. They went out arm in arm, in the joy of being together; and it was then that they, taking her for his sweetheart, called her "rather ancient."

She took him to dine, alone by themselves, in an inn kept by Paimpol people, which had been recommended to her as not too dear.

Then, still arm in arm, they went into Brest, to look at the displays in the shops. And nothing was so amusing as what she found to tell her grandson to make him laugh, — all in Paimpol Breton, which the passers-by could not understand.

## VIII.

She remained with him three days, — three red-letter days over which hung a gloomy foreboding, like three days of grace.

And at last she had been obliged to leave him, to return to Ploubazlanec. In the first place because she had come to the end of her little savings, and then because Sylvestre was going to sail the next day but one, and sailors are kept inexorably in quarters the day before starting on important voyages (a custom which at first thought seems rather cruel, but is a necessary precaution against the sprees they are apt to indulge in at the last moment).

Oh, that last day! She tried in vain, she racked her brain to think of something amusing to tell her grandson; she found nothing, but the tears kept coming to her eyes, and sobs were constantly choking her. Leaning on his arm, she gave him a thousand good counsels, and these made him, too, feel like weeping. And they finally went into a church to say their prayers together.

She was going home by the evening train. For economy's sake, they walked to the station, he carrying her travelling box and supporting her with his strong arm, on which she leaned with all her weight. She was weary, very weary, the poor old dame; she was quite exhausted with trying to do so much in the last three or four days. Her back was all bent over under her brown shawl, for want of strength to straighten herself up; she had lost all appearance of youthfulness in her figure, and felt deeply the overwhelming burden of her seventy-six years. At the thought that it was all coming to an end, that in a few minutes she must leave him, her heart was bursting with grief. And it was to China he was going; off to that place of massacre! She still had him with her; she was still holding him with her poor hands. . . . Nevertheless he would leave her; not all her longing, nor all her tears, nor all her despair as his grandmother, would avail to keep him! . . .

Encumbered with her ticket, her basket of provisions, her mittens, agitated, trembling, she gave him her last counsels, to each of which he replied very low with a little submissive yes, his head bent affectionately toward her, looking at her with his kind, gentle eyes, with his boyish manner.

"Come, old woman, decide whether you want to go or not!"

The engine whistled. Seized with the fear of missing her train, she took her box from his hands,

then dropped it on the ground, to throw her arms around his neck in one last embrace.

They attracted a great deal of attention in the station, but they no longer gave any one occasion to smile. Hurried along by the guards, exhausted, bewildered, she threw herself into the first compartment she came to, and the door was slammed behind her, while he started off on the run, circling about like a bird in flight, in order to go around the station, and reach the gate outside in time to see her pass.

A screaming of the whistle, a noisy jarring of the wheels, — the grandmother passed by. He, standing against the gate, with youthful grace waved his cap with its fluttering ribbons, and leaning out the window of her third-class carriage, she signalled with her handkerchief that he might distinguish her the more easily. As long as she was able, as long as she could make out the blue-black figure which was her grandson, she followed him with her eyes, and with her whole soul wished him the dubious "au revoir" which people say to sailors when they are going away.

Look at little Sylvestre well, poor old woman, till the last minute, follow well his fading form, which will disappear there forever.

And when she could see him no longer, she fell back in her seat, unconcerned about rumpling her best head-dress, weeping and sobbing in deathly agony.

He went slowly back, with his head bent, and great tears falling down his cheeks. The autumn night had come, the gas was lighted everywhere, the sailors' festival had begun. Without noticing anything he crossed Brest, then the bridge to Recouvrance, and went to his quarters.

"Listen a moment, my fine fellow," said the hoarse voices of those ladies who had already begun to walk the streets.

He went in and lay down in his hammock, weeping all alone, and scarcely sleeping at all till morning.

## IX.

. . . . . .

He was out on the wide ocean, having quickly crossed to unknown seas, much bluer than those of Iceland.

The vessel, which was bearing him away to far off Asia, had orders to make haste, to reach its destination as soon as possible.

He was already conscious of being far away, on account of the incessant, monotonous, perpetual swiftness almost regardless of wind and tide. As topman, he lived perched like a bird in the rigging, avoiding the crowd of soldiers on the deck below.

They stopped twice on the coast of Tunis, to take on zouaves and mules; while still a long way off, he had noticed the white towns on the sands or on the moun

tains. He had even come down from aloft to look with curiosity at the dusky men, wearing white turbans, who had come in boats to sell fruit; the others had told him that they were Bedouins.

The heat and the sunlight, which still continued in spite of the autumn season, gave him a strange sense of being far from home.

One day they came to a town called Port-Saïd. All the flags of Europe were flying from long staffs, giving it the air of a festive Babel, and the shining sands surrounded it like a sea. They anchored there close to the wharves, almost in the midst of the long streets with wooden houses. Never since his departure had he seen the outside world so plainly and so near, and the commotion, the profusion of boats, distracted him.

With the constant noise of whistles and steam sirens, all these vessels were making their way into a sort of long narrow, trench-like canal, which stretched away in a silvery line through the endless sands. From the top of his mast, he saw them going away in a procession to disappear in the plains.

Every kind of costume was moving about on the wharves: men in garments of all colors, busy, shouting in the grand bustle of transit. And at night the diabolical whistling of engines was mingled with the confused sounds of numerous orchestras playing noisy tunes as if to drown the heart-rending regrets of all the exiles passing through.

The next day, as soon as the sun had risen, they too entered the narrow ribbon of water among the sands, followed by a train of boats of all nations. This filing through the desert lasted two days; then another sea opened before them, and they went out into the open again.

They continued to sail very swiftly. This warmer sea was streaked with red on the surface, and sometimes the foam tossed up in the wake of the vessel would have the color of blood. He spent almost all his time aloft, singing low to himself, "Jean-François de Nantes," to recall his brother Yann, Iceland, and the good times of the past.

Sometimes, in the far distance filled with mirage, he saw some mountain of extraordinary color come into sight. Those who were steering the vessel, in spite of the distance and their indistinctness, were doubtless familiar with these headlands of continents which are everlasting guides on the great highways of the world. But the topman sails like a thing transported, not knowing anything, unconscious of the distances and measures on the endless expanse of waters.

He had but one thought, that of being a frightful distance away, and that it was constantly increasing; but this thought was very clear to him, as he watched from above the swift, hissing wake stretching away behind, as he considered how long this speed, never slackening by day or night, had been going on.

Below, on the deck, the crowd of men collected under the shade of the awnings were panting for breath. The water, the air, and the light had taken on a melancholy, overpowering splendor; and the never-ending glory of these things was like irony to human beings, to organized existences so ephemeral.

Once, from his perch, he was very much amused by flocks of little birds of an unknown variety, which flew on the vessel like clouds of black dust. They allowed themselves to be caught and caressed, seeming to be quite exhausted. They flew on the shoulders of all the topmen.

But soon the most weary began to die.

These tiny little things died by thousands, on the yards, on the portholes, in the terrible sun of the Red Sea.

They had come from far beyond the great deserts driven by a violent wind. Through fear of falling into the infinite blue all about them, they had dropped down in a last exhausted flight on the passing vessel. Yonder, in the depths of some distant region of Libya, their race had multiplied in exuberant love. Their race had multiplied excessively, and there were too many of them; so the blind, soulless mother, Mother Nature, had, with a breath, driven away this excess of little birds with as much indifference as if it had been a generation of men.

And they were all dying on the heated ironwork of the vessel; the deck was strewn with their little

bodies, yesterday palpitating with life, with songs, and love. . . . Sylvestre and the other topmen gathered together the little black rags of wet feathers, spreading their delicate bluish wings out in their hands with a look of commiseration, and then swept them into the great nothingness of the sea.

Then crowds of grasshoppers, descendants of those of Moses, came by, and the vessel was covered with them.

Then they sailed several days more on the unchangeable blue, without seeing a living thing, except occasional fishes, which came up to the surface of the water.

## X.

RAIN in torrents under a lowering black sky; such was India. Sylvestre had just set foot in this land, as he had been chosen on board to make one of the crew of a yawl.

The warm shower fell on him through the thick foliage, and he saw strange things all about him. Everything was magnificently green. The leaves of the trees looked like gigantic feathers; and the people walking about had large velvety eyes, which seemed to close under the weight of their lids. The wind which brought this rain smelt of musk and flowers.

Some women motioned to him to follow them; somewhat like the "Look here, my fine fellow," heard so many times in Brest. But in this enchanted country, their call was enticing, and made his flesh quiver. Their superb bosoms swelled out under their transparent muslin drapery; they were tawny and shining like bronze.

Hesitating, and yet fascinated by them, he stepped forward, little by little, to follow them.

But just then a little whistle, modulating like the trill of a bird, suddenly recalled him to the yawl, which was ready to start.

He hurried away; farewell to the beauties of India! When he was out at sea again, that evening, he was still as unspotted as a child.

After another week on the blue waters, they stopped in a new country of rain and verdure. A crowd of small yellow men, shouting and carrying baskets of coal, immediately rushed on board.

"Are we already in China?" asked Sylvestre, noticing that they all had grotesque faces and pig-tails.

They told him no, he must have patience and wait a little longer; this was only Singapore. He went back aloft to avoid the black dust brought by the wind, while they were hurriedly emptying the coal from thousands of little baskets into the coal-holes.

At last a day came when they reached a country called Tourane, where a certain *Circé* was found

anchored, blockading the place. This was the vessel on which he had known for a long time that he was destined to serve, and they left him there with his bag.

He found some of his countrymen there, and even two Icelanders, who were gunners for the time being.

That evening, the weather being always warm and calm, and as there was nothing to do, they collected on the bridge, apart from the others, to have a talk about Brittany.

He was to pass five months of inaction and exile in this melancholy bay before the desired moment to engage in battle.

## XI.

. . . . . .

PAIMPOL, the last day of February, — the day before the fishermen's departure for Iceland.

Gaud was standing, motionless and very pale, against the door of her room.

Yann was downstairs, talking with her father. She had seen him come in, and could hear the sound of his voice indistinctly.

They had not met all winter, as if a fatality had always kept them apart.

After her walk to Pors-Even, she looked forward with some hope to the Icelanders' *pardon*, when people have opportunities to meet and talk together in groups in the square during the evening. But

early in the morning of that holiday, the streets having been already hung with white decorations and green wreaths, a severe rain, brought from the west by a howling wind, began to fall in torrents; the sky had never been seen so black in Paimpol. "Well, nobody will come from Ploubazlanec," sorrowfully said the young girls who had lovers there. And indeed they did not come, or else they quickly took refuge in the public-houses. No procession, no walks; and she, more heavy-hearted than ever, stayed by her window all the evening, listening to the water running over the roofs and the fishermen's noisy songs rising from the inns.

For several days she had been expecting this visit from Yann, feeling sure that for this matter of the sale of the boat, which had not yet been settled, Father Gaos, who did not like to come to Paimpol, would send his son. So she had made up her mind to go to him, — an unusual thing for a young girl to do, — and speak to him, in order to have a clear understanding. She would reproach him for having aroused her affections and then deserted her, after the fashion of dishonorable fellows. Obstinacy, timidity, attachment to his following of the sea, or fear of being refused, . . . if all these obstacles suggested by Sylvestre were the only ones, they might be overcome, who knows! after a frank talk such as theirs would be. And then perhaps his lovely smile would return, and that would settle

everything, — that same smile which had surprised and charmed her so much the winter before on the night of a certain ball wholly spent in waltzing with his arm around her. And this hope gave her courage, filled her with an almost sweet impatience.

As she thought it over, everything seemed so easy, so simple to say and to do.

And it happened that Yann had come at a fortunate time. She felt sure that her father, who was enjoying a smoke, would not trouble himself to see him out; so she would be able at last to have an explanation with him in the hall alone.

But now that the time had come, her venture seemed too bold. The very thought of meeting him, of seeing him face to face at the foot of the stairs, made her tremble. Her heart throbbed as if it would burst. . . . And to think that in a moment or two the door below would open, with the little grating sound she knew so well, to let him pass!

No, assuredly, she would never have the courage. Rather waste away with waiting and die of grief than attempt such a thing! And she took several steps toward the other side of her room to sit down and work.

But she stopped again, hesitating, bewildered, remembering that the following day he was to sail for Iceland, and that this was her only chance of speaking to him. If she missed it, she would again have to pass months in loneliness and waiting, long-

ing for his return, and lose another summer of her life.

The door opened below; Yann was coming out! With a sudden resolution she ran down the stairs, and stood trembling before him.

"Monsieur Yann, I would like to speak to you, if you please."

"To me, Mademoiselle Gaud?" he said, in a low voice, touching his hat.

He looked at her wildly with his keen eyes, his head thrown back, a hard expression on his face, seeming to question whether he ought to stop. One foot forward ready to go, he planted his broad shoulders against the wall, as if to be farther away from her in this narrow passage where he was caught.

Almost petrified, she could not think of a word she had intended to say to him. She had not imagined that he would offer her such an affront as to pass without listening to her. . . .

"Are you afraid of our house, Monsieur Yann?" she asked, in a dry, strange voice, not at all what she wished to have.

He turned away his eyes, and looked outside. His cheeks had grown very red, his face burned, and his mobile nostrils dilated with every breath, following the motions of his chest like those of bulls.

She tried to go on:—

"That night of the ball. when we were together,

you bade me good-bye as if you cared for me — Monsieur Yann, you do not remember, then. . . . What have I done to you?"

The cruel west wind, which was very strong at that time, came in at the door, blowing Yann's hair and the strings of Gaud's head-dress, and slammed a door furiously behind them. This hall was a bad place in which to talk seriously. After these first remarks, which choked her, Gaud remained silent, feeling dizzy and without another idea in her head. They went toward the street door, while he avoided her all the while.

Outside it was blowing furiously, and the sky was black. Through the open door a livid, melancholy light fell full on their faces. And an opposite neighbor was looking at them: what could these two be saying to each other, that they appeared so troubled? What was going on at the Mévels'?

"No, Mademoiselle Gaud," he replied at last, extricating himself with the ease of a deer; "I have already heard that we are talked about in the neighborhood. No, Mademoiselle Gaud. . . . You are rich; we do not belong to the same class. It is not for me to come to your house."

And he went out.

So it was all over, over forever. And she had not even said what she intended to tell him, in this interview which had only succeeded in making her seem bold in his eyes. What a fellow this Yann was, with

his scorn for girls, his scorn for money, his scorn for everything!

At first she stood rooted to the spot, dizzy, with everything swimming about her.

And then an idea, more intolerable than all the rest, came to her like lightning: Yann's companions, Icelanders, were walking in the square, waiting for him! If he should tell them, making sport of her, it would be a more odious insult than all the rest. She went quickly up to her room, to watch them through her curtains.

In front of the house, she really saw a group of these men. But they were merely watching the sky, which was growing darker and darker, and were making conjectures about the heavy rain threatening, saying, —

"It is only a squall; let us go in and have a drink, until it is over."

And then they joked loudly about Jeannie Caroff, and different girls; but none of them looked toward her window.

They were all merry, except him, and he made no answer, nor smiled, but remained grave and melancholy. He did not go in to drink with the others, and without paying any attention to them or to the rain, which had already begun, walking slowly in the shower, as if absorbed in thought, he crossed the square in the direction of Ploubazlanec.

Then she forgave him all, and a feeling of hopeless

tenderness took the place of the bitter indignation which had first arisen in her heart.

She sat down with her face in her hands. What should she do now?

Oh, if he had only listened to her a moment! or, rather, if he could come there, alone with her in this room, where they could talk quietly, all might yet be explained.

She loved him well enough to dare to tell him so to his face. She would say to him: —

"You sought me when I asked nothing of you; now I am yours, with all my soul, if you want me. See, I do not hesitate to become a fisherman's wife; and yet among the boys in Paimpol, I should only have to choose, if I wanted one for a husband; but I love you, because, in spite of everything, I believe you are better than the other young men. I am rather rich; I know that I am pretty; although I have lived in the city, I assure you that I am a good girl, never having done anything wrong; so, since I love you so much, why will you not take me?"

But all this would never be expressed, never spoken, except in imagination: it was too late; Yann would not hear her. Attempt to speak to him a second time — oh, no! what kind of a creature would he take her for then? She would rather die!

And to-morrow they would all start for Iceland!

Alone in her beautiful room, where the white February daylight came in, feeling cold, sitting in one of

the chairs arranged along by the wall, it seemed to her as if the world was falling, with things present and things to come, to the bottom of a dismal, frightful void, which had just been made everywhere about her.

She wished that life was over, that she was sleeping peacefully under a stone, to escape further suffering. Yet she really forgave him, and no hatred was mingled with her despairing love for him. . . .

## XII.

. . . . . .

THE sea, the gray sea.

For a day Yann had been gently gliding along the trackless highway, which leads the fishermen every summer to Iceland.

The day before, when they started away, singing the old hymns, a south wind was blowing, and all the vessels, under full sail, were scattered like sea-gulls.

Then the wind abated, and their pace slackened; banks of fog travelled over the surface of the water.

Yann was possibly more silent than usual. He complained of the calm weather, and seemed as if he needed to bestir himself in order to drive away some trouble from his mind. However, there was nothing to do but to move tranquilly in the midst of tranquillity; nothing but to breathe and to live. As one looked around, there was nothing to be seen but

thick grayness; as one listened, there was nothing to be heard but silence. . . .

Suddenly there was a dull sound, scarcely perceptible, but unusual, coming from beneath, with a grating sensation, like that felt in a carriage when the brakes are applied to the wheels! And the *Marie*, stopping her course, remained motionless. . . .

Stranded! Where, and upon what? Some shoal on the English coast, probably. They had seen nothing since the evening before, on account of these curtains of fog.

The men rushed about, running hither and thither; and their excited commotion was a contrast to the sudden congealed stillness of their vessel. The *Marie* had stopped in this place, and did not stir. In the midst of this vast expanse of waters, which, in this thick weather, seemed to have no consistency, she had been seized by some unknown, fixed resistance which was concealed under the water; she was caught fast, and in danger of perishing there.

Who has not seen some poor bird, some poor fly, caught by its feet in bird-lime?

At first it is not apparent; it does not change its appearance; it has yet to learn that it is caught underneath, and is in danger of never being able to extricate itself.

It is when it finally begins to struggle that the sticky material soils its wings, its head: and little by little

it takes on the pitiable appearance of an animal in distress about to die.

This was the case with the *Marie*. At first it did not seem much; she tipped a good deal, it is true, but it was in the early morning, and the weather was beautifully calm. They had to learn the real state of affairs before they grew anxious and realized that it was a serious matter.

The captain, who had made the mistake by not paying enough attention to their course, seemed greatly concerned; he shook his hands in the air, saying, "*Ma Doué! Ma Doué!*" in a tone of despair.

As the fog lifted, a headland, which they did not recognize, appeared very near them. The fog settled down again almost immediately; it could no longer be seen.

Moreover, there was no sail in sight, no steamboat. And for the time being they almost preferred to have it so: they stood in great fear of those English sailors, who come to rescue you after their own fashion, and from whom it is necessary to defend yourselves as if they were pirates.

They all made a great commotion, — changing about, upsetting the ballast. Their dog Turc, who was never afraid of the motion of the sea, was very much affected by this accident; the sounds from below, the severe shock when the waves passed, and then the coming to a standstill, — he understood very

well that all this was unnatural, and with his tail between his legs, hid himself in a corner.

Afterward, they lowered some of the boats to cast anchor to try to pull the vessel off by uniting all their strength on the warps, — hard work, which lasted for ten consecutive hours. And when night came, the poor boat, so clean and spruce in the morning, was already beginning to look shabby, drenched, dirty, everything in disorder. Shaken in every part, she struggled to free herself; but still remained where she was, fastened like a dead boat.

. . . . . .

Night was coming upon them; the wind was rising, and the waves were growing higher. This gave a poor outlook; when suddenly, about six o'clock, behold, they were released, and started off, breaking the hawsers they had out to hold by. Then the men ran like mad from one end of the vessel to the other, shouting, —

"We are afloat!"

They actually were afloat; but how can their joy be expressed, their delight at feeling themselves in motion, again becoming a thing of fleetness, alive, instead of the wreck they seemed just before!

And at the same time Yann's melancholy took wings also, lightened like his boat. Cured by the healthful wearying of his arms, he had recovered his usual indifference, shaken off his dreams.

The next morning, when they had finished hoisting the anchors, he continued his way to cold Iceland, his heart apparently as free as in his earliest years.

## XIII.

. . . . . .

THEY were distributing the mail from France on board the *Circé*, over there in the roadstead of Ha-Long, at the other end of the earth. In the midst of a crowd of sailors, the purser was calling out in a loud voice the names of those who were fortunate enough to have letters. This was taking place in the evening, in the battery, where they were jostling each other around a lantern.

"Sylvestre Moan!" There was one for him, one well covered with stamps from Paimpol; but it was not Gaud's handwriting. What could it mean, and whom did it come from?

After turning it over and over, he opened it fearfully.

PLOUBAZLANEC, March 5, 1884.

MY DEAR GRANDSON, —

. . . . . .

It was from his good old grandmother, after all; then he breathed freer. She had even placed at the bottom her own awkward signature, learned by heart, all shaky and like a school-girl's: "Widow Moan."

Widow Moan! He brought the paper to his lips spontaneously, and kissed the poor name as if it were a sacred amulet. This letter had come at a critical time in his life: to-morrow morning, at daybreak, he was to go forth to battle.

It was the middle of April; Bac-Ninh and Hong-Hoa had just been taken. No important engagement was near at hand in Tonkin: still, the reinforcements which arrived were not sufficient; so they were taking from the ships' crews all that could be spared to complete the companies of sailors already landed. And Sylvestre, who had for a long time been languishing in the cruisers and blockades, had just been appointed, with some others, to fill the ranks in one of those companies.

At this time, it is true, there was talk of peace; but something told them that they would yet land in time to do a little fighting. Having packed their knapsacks, finished their preparations, and said their farewells, they spent the evening walking with those who were to be left behind, feeling grand and proud among them; each one, after his own fashion, showing his feelings at going away, — some grave and rather thoughtful, others expressing themselves exuberantly.

Sylvestre was very silent, and kept to himself his impatience to be off; only when one looked at him, a slight, constrained smile seemed to say, —

"Yes; I am actually going, and to-morrow morn-

ing." He had as yet only an indistinct idea of war and battle; but yet it fascinated him, because he came of a valiant race.

Feeling anxious about Gaud, on account of the strange handwriting, he tried to get near a lantern to read the letter. It was a difficult matter in the midst of these groups of half-naked men, crowding around it, to read their letters in the stifling heat of the battery.

In the beginning of the letter, as he had expected, Grandmother Yvonne explained why she had been obliged to have recourse to the inexperienced hand of an old neighbor: —

"My dear child, your cousin is not writing to you for me this time, because she is in deep trouble. Her father died suddenly two days ago, and it seems that all his fortune was lost by unfortunate investments in Paris this winter. So his house and furniture are to be sold. No one in the country expected such a thing. I think, my dear child, that this will pain you as much as it does me.

"Son Gaos wished me to send you his greeting; he renewed his engagement with Captain Guermeur, still on the *Marie*, and they sailed for Iceland very early this year. They started the first of this month, two days before the great misfortune which came to our poor Gaud, and they knew nothing about it.

"But you may be sure, my dear son, that now it is all over, they will never be married; because now she will be obliged to work for her living. . . . "

He was overwhelmed; this bad news spoiled all his pleasure in going to battle.

## PART THIRD.

### I.

. . . . . .

A BULLET whistles through the air! Sylvestre stops short to listen. . . .

It is on a vast plain, of the tender, velvety green of springtime. The sky is gray and lowering.

Six armed sailors are there, reconnoitring in some fresh rice-fields, in a muddy footpath.

Again! . . . the same sound, in the still air!—a sharp, snorting sound, like a prolonged *dzinn*, giving the impression of some hard, cruel little thing, passing very swiftly and directly, a meeting with which might be fatal.

For the first time in his life Sylvestre was listening to this music. These bullets coming toward you sound very different from those you send off yourself: the shot, coming from a distance, is diminished, no longer heard; so you distinguish more clearly the little metallic humming, as it darts swiftly by, grazing your ears. . . .

And *dzinn* again, and *dzinn!* The bullets rain now. Very near where the sailors have stopped short, they bury themselves in the overflowed soil

of the rice-field, each with the little dry, quick sound of hail and the light splashing of water.

They looked at each other, smiling, as if it were a cleverly played farce, and they said, —

"The Chinese!" (Annamites, Tonquinites, Black-Flags, — all in the eyes of the sailors belonged to the same family of Chinese.)

How can one express the disdain, the old, scornful malice, combativeness, they put into their manner of calling them, "The Chinese!"

Two or three bullets more whistle by, nearer the ground; they rebound like grasshoppers in the grass. This watering of lead only lasted a moment, and now it has ceased. On the wide, green plain, absolute silence returns, and not a moving thing is seen anywhere.

They are all six still standing, on the watch, sniffing the air, trying to find out where all this could have come from.

Surely from yonder clump of bamboos, forming a kind of feathery island in the plain, and behind which appeared some angular, half-hidden roofs. Then they run toward them, over the soaking ground of the rice-field, their feet sinking in or slipping; Sylvestre, with his longer, more nimble legs, runs ahead of the others.

There was no whistling now; it seemed as if they had been dreaming. . . .

And as in every country in the world certain

things are always and eternally the same, — the gray of the clouded sky, the fresh tints of the meadows in spring, — they might almost have believed they were beholding the fields of France, running merrily there, for quite a different game from that of death.

But as they draw near, the bamboos reveal the exotic delicacy of their foliage, the strange curves of the village roofs become more accentuated; and yellow men, lying in ambush behind, advance to look at them, their flat faces contracted with malice and fear. Then suddenly they come out with a cry, and display themselves in a long wavering line, but decided and dangerous.

"The Chinese!" the sailors say again, with the same brave smile.

But this time they find that there are many of them; that there are too many. And one of them, turning around, notices others coming from behind, emerging from the bamboos.

. . . . . .

The little Sylvestre was very handsome at this moment on that day; his old grandmother would have been proud to see him such a warrior!

He had become transfigured in the last few days, — bronzed, his voice changed; he was in his element there. In a moment of supreme indecision, the sailors, grazed by the bullets, had almost begun to retreat, and that would have been death to all; but Sylvestre had continued to advance. Having taken

his gun by the barrel, he was coping with a number of the enemy, striking out right and left with heavy blows from his gun-stock, which knocked them down; and, thanks to him, the affair took a different turn. The panic, the madness, the strange something which blindly decides everything in such little undirected combats, passed over to the side of the Chinese; they were the ones who began to retreat.

It was ended now, — they were fleeing; and the six sailors, reloading their guns and firing rapidly, laid them out at their pleasure. There were red pools in the grass, mutilated bodies, skulls pouring out their brains into the water on the rice-field.

They were running away, all bent over, crouching close to the ground like leopards; and Sylvestre was running after them, although wounded twice, — a lance-thrust in his thigh, a deep gash in his arm, — but conscious of nothing but the intoxication of fighting, that unreasoning intoxication which comes from vigorous blood, that which gives superb courage to the simple, and made heroes in ancient times.

One whom he was pursuing turned to fire at him in an inspiration of hopeless terror. Sylvestre stopped, smiling, scornful, sublime, to let him discharge his arms, then jumped a little to the left, as he saw the direction the shot would take. But in pulling the trigger the barrel of the gun chanced to deviate in the same direction. Then he felt a crashing sensation in his chest; and, understanding per-

fectly well what it meant, a sudden thought, even before he felt any pain, made him turn toward the other sailors behind him to try to repeat like an old soldier the consecrated expression, "I believe it 's all over with me."

In the great effort that he made, after running, to fill his lungs through his mouth with air, he felt it enter also through a hole in his right breast, with a horrible little sound, suggestive of broken bellows. At the same time his mouth filled with blood, and he felt a sharp pain in his side, which rapidly increased until it was something agonizing, indescribable.

He turned around two or three times, with his head whirling, and trying to get his breath through all the red liquid which came up and choked him; and then he fell heavily over into the mud.

## II.

* * * * * *

About two weeks later, as the sky was growing darker with the approach of rain, and the heat more oppressive over yellow Tonquin, Sylvestre, who had been brought back to Hanoï, was sent to the harbor of Ha-Long, and put on board a hospital ship which was going back to France.

He had been carried about for a long time on various litters, with times of confinement in ambulances. They had done what they could; but under

these unfavorable conditions his chest had filled with water on the wounded side, and the air was constantly entering, with a gurgling sound, through the opening, which did not heal.

He had received the military medal, and it had given him a moment's joy.

But he was no longer the warrior he had been, with decided step, clear, commanding voice. No; all this had given way before his long suffering and the weakening fever. He had become a child again, longing for home; he hardly said a word, speaking with difficulty in a little feeble voice, scarcely audible. To feel so sick, and to be so far, so far away; to think that it would take such days and days to reach his native land, — would he live till then, with his constantly diminishing strength?

The thought of being such a frightful distance from home continually weighed upon his mind; it oppressed his waking thoughts when, after some hours of sleep, he again became conscious of the frightful pain from his wounds, his burning fever, and the little wheezing sound in his broken chest. So he begged them to send him home at any risk.

He was very heavy to carry on his cot; consequently they involuntarily jarred him cruelly as they bore him along.

On board this transport ship, which was ready to sail, they put him in one of the little iron beds, arranged in hospital fashion, and he began his long

voyage back again across the seas. But this time, instead of living like a bird in the fresh air in the tops of the masts, he was in the heavy atmosphere below, amid the odors of medicines, wounds, and other ailments.

For the first few days the joy of being on the way home made him seem a little better. He could sit bolstered up with pillows in bed, and occasionally he asked for his box. His sailor's box was the white-wood chest bought in Paimpol to hold his valuables. It contained his letters from Grandmother Yvonne, from Yann and Gaud, a book in which he had copied some sea-songs, and a book of Confucius in Chinese, taken as plunder, and in which, on the blank sides of the leaves, he had written the simple journal of his campaign.

The wound, however, did not improve, and from the first week the doctors thought that he could not live.

They were now near the equator, where it was excessively hot and stormy. The transport vessel sailed onward, shaking her beds, her sick, and wounded, — sailed along swiftly over the heavy sea, still troubled by the changing of the trade-winds.

Since they left Ha-Long, more than one had died, and had been cast into the deep water on this highway to France. Many of the little beds had already been relieved of their poor occupants.

On this particular day, in the moving hospital, it

was very gloomy; the high sea had obliged them to close the iron shutters of the port-holes, and this made the stifling atmosphere about the sick still more horrible.

He was growing worse; the end was approaching. Always lying on his wounded side, he pressed it with both hands, with all the strength he had left, to keep the water, the liquid decomposition, in the right lung from moving, and to try to breathe only with the other. But this other one became gradually affected by the right, and the last suffering had begun.

All sorts of visions of home haunted his dying brain; in the hot darkness, beloved or frightful faces came to bend over him. He was in a perpetual state of hallucination, in which he dreamed of Brittany and Iceland.

In the morning he had the priest called; and he, an old man, accustomed to see sailors die, was surprised to find beneath this manly form the purity of a little child.

He asked for air, more air; but there was none anywhere. The ventilators gave none at all; the nurse, who fanned him all the time with a Chinese flowered fan, only stirred above him the unwholesome vapors, the dead atmosphere, already breathed a hundred times, and which was torture to the lungs.

Sometimes he was seized with a desperate determination to get out of the bed, where he felt so

keenly the approach of death, to go to the open air above to try to get new life. . . . Oh, how he envied those who were running about in the shrouds, living in the tops of the masts! . . . But all his efforts to get away ended in only lifting his head and his feeble neck, — something like the unfinished movements we make in sleep. Ah, no! he could not do it; he fell back in the same hollows of his tumbled bed, already held there by death. And each time, after the weariness of such exertion, he would lose consciousness for a moment.

To gratify him, they opened a port-hole, although it was still dangerous, as the sea was not yet calm enough; it was about six o'clock in the evening. When the iron shutter was raised, it only let in light, dazzling red light. The setting sun appeared in extreme splendor on the horizon through a rent in the dark sky; travelling across the rolling water, and swaying like a waving torch, it illumined this hospital with its blinding glare.

But no air came in; the little there was outside was powerless to enter here and drive away the smell of fever. Nowhere on this infinite equatorial sea was there anything but hot humidity, stifling oppressiveness. No air anywhere, not even for the dying, who were panting for breath.

One last vision troubled him greatly: his old grandmother, with an expression of heart-rending anxiety, walking very swiftly along the road; the rain

was falling fast; low, funereal clouds covered the sky; she was going to Paimpol, having been called to the marine bureau to be informed of his death.

He was struggling now; the death-rattle was in his throat. They wiped away from the corners of his mouth the water and blood which poured from his lungs, in his convulsions of agony. And the magnificent sun was still shining. As it set, the whole world seemed to be on fire, as if the clouds were full of blood. Through the open port-hole, a wide band of red fire came in and rested on Sylvestre's bed, making a halo around him.

At this moment, the sun was shining, too, over in Brittany, where it was just noon. It was the very same sun, and exactly the same moment in its endless course. There, however, it had a very different color, standing higher in the deep blue sky; it was shining with a soft white light upon Grandmother Yvonne, as she sat sewing in her doorway.

In Iceland, where it was morning, it was shining, too, at this moment of death; so much paler that it seemed as if it only succeeded in being seen at all by a sort of intensified obliquity. It was sending forth its melancholy beams in a fiord where the *Marie* was drifting; and the sky at this time was of a hyperborean purity, suggesting the idea of frozen planets without atmosphere. With icy clearness, it accentuated the details of this chaos of rocks which is Iceland; all this country, seen from the *Marie*,

seemed laid out on the same plan, and standing on end. Yann, who was there fishing, as usual, had a strange appearance in the midst of this lunar aspect.

At the moment the track of red fire coming in through the port-hole was extinguished, when the equatorial sun vanished completely in the gilded waters, the eyes of the dying grandson rolled up as if they would disappear in his head. Then they closed his lids, with their long lashes, and Sylvestre became very beautiful and calm, like sleeping marble.

## III.

I CANNOT refrain from describing Sylvestre's burial, which I superintended myself, over there in the island of Singapore. Enough others had been thrown into the China Sea during the first days of our voyage; as this uncomfortable land was very near, it was decided to keep him a few hours longer in order to bury him there.

It took place very early in the morning, on account of the terrible sun. His body was covered with the French flag, as it lay in the boat which bore him away. The large, strange town was still asleep when we reached the shore. A little wagon, sent by the consul, awaited us on the wharf; in it we placed Sylvestre and the wooden cross, which had been made for him on board. The paint was still fresh on it, as it had been done in haste, and the

white letters of his name ran into the black background.

We crossed this Babel as the sun rose; and then it was touching to find there, close to the filthy Chinese rabble, the quiet of a French church. Under the lofty white nave, where I stood alone with my sailors, the *Dies Iræ*, chanted by a missionary priest, sounded like a sweet, magical incantation. Through the open doors the scene resembled enchanted gardens, — wonderful verdure, immense palm-trees; the wind shook the great trees in bloom, and carmine-colored petals came down in showers, even into the church itself.

Afterward we went to the cemetery, a long distance away. Our little procession of sailors was very modest, and the coffin was still covered with the French flag. We were obliged to pass through the Chinese quarters, swarming with yellow people, then the suburbs of Malays and Indians, where every sort of Asiatic face looked at us in astonishment as we passed.

Then we reached the country, already hot, through shady roads, where wonderful butterflies with blue velvety wings fluttered about. The flowers and palm-trees grew in profuse luxuriance, all the splendors of equatorial exuberance. At last we came to the cemetery, — the tombs of mandarins, with many-colored inscriptions, dragons, and monsters, amazing foliage, strange plants. The place

where we laid him was like a corner in the gardens of Indra.

On his grave we set up the little wooden cross, made hastily for him in the night:—

SYLVESTRE MOAN.
Nineteen years.

And we left him there, in haste to return on account of the sun, which was rising higher and higher, turning to take a last look at him under the marvellous trees, under the splendid flowers.

## IV.

THE transport ship continued its way across the Indian Ocean. Sufferers were still imprisoned in the floating hospital below. On deck nothing appeared but thoughtlessness, health, and youth. All about on the sea it was a veritable festival of pure air and sunshine.

During the fine weather caused by the trade-winds, the sailors, stretched out in the shade of the sails, amused themselves by making their parrots run about. (In Singapore, where they come from, they sell all kinds of tamed animals to the sailors passing through.)

They had all chosen baby parrots, with childish expressions on their bird-faces, tailless, but already green, — oh, such a wonderful green! The papas

and mammas had been green; so, although very young, they had unwittingly inherited this color. On the clean deck of the vessel they looked like very freshly fallen leaves from some tropical tree.

Sometimes they collected them all together. Then they would look comically at each other; they would begin to turn their necks in every direction, as if to examine one another under different aspects; they would walk about as if they were lame, fluttering their wings in a comical fashion, and suddenly start very swiftly and eagerly for no one knew where, and some of them would fall down.

And then the monkeys learned to do tricks, which was another amusement. Some of them were fondly loved and extravagantly petted, and would curl themselves up against their masters' hard breasts, looking at them with eyes like a woman's, half grotesque, half pathetic.

When three o'clock sounded, the quartermasters brought on deck two linen bags, sealed with large seals of red wax, and marked with Sylvestre's name. They were to be sold at auction, according to the rule required in case of the deceased, — all his clothing, everything in the world that had belonged to him; and the sailors collected around them in high glee. On board a hospital ship these sales are seen so often that they cause no emotion; and, moreover, Sylvestre had been little known on this vessel.

His jackets, shirts, blue-striped trousers were handled, turned over, and then knocked down at any price, the purchasers overrating their value for their own amusement.

Then came the little sacred box, which they apprised at fifty sous. They had taken out the letters and the military medal; but it still contained the book of songs, the book of Confucius, thread, buttons, needles, and all the little things which Grandmother Yvonne's foresight had supplied for mending and darning.

Then the quartermaster, who was exhibiting the things for sale, held up two little Buddhas, taken in a pagoda, to be given to Gaud; and they were so funny in appearance that there was a shout of laughter when they saw them offered as the last lot. It was not because the sailors were heartless that they laughed, but only through thoughtlessness.

Finally they sold the bags; and the purchaser immediately began to remove the name on them, in order to put his own in its place.

Afterward they swept the immaculate deck very carefully, to remove all dust and lint which had dropped from the unpacking.

And the sailors gayly returned to their play with the parrots and monkeys.

## V.

. . . . . .

One day in the early part of June, as old Yvonne was returning home, some neighbors told her that some one from the superintendent of the maritime *Inscription* had been looking for her.

It was something concerning her grandson surely, but it did not alarm her at all. In families of seafaring people they often have business with the *Inscription;* and she, the daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother of sailors, had been familiar with this bureau for as much as sixty years.

It was probably about his commission; or perhaps a little money from the *Circé*, which she would receive as proxy for her grandson.

Knowing what was due Monsieur the Superintendent, she put on her best dress and a white cap, and then started on her way about two o'clock.

Trotting along quite fast, and with short steps, over the footpaths on the cliff, she went toward Paimpol, feeling a little anxious, as she reflected that she had received no letter for two months.

She passed her old lover, sitting in the doorway; he had failed very much since the cold winter.

"Well? Whenever you are ready, you know; but don't trouble yourself, dear! . . . (Again he referred to the costume of boards.)

The merry June weather was smiling all about her

everywhere. On the rocky heights there was never anything but the low broom with its golden yellow flowers; but in the lowlands, sheltered from the sea-breezes, was found lovely fresh verdure, hawthorn hedges in bloom, tall, fragrant grass. She saw nothing of all this, — she, who was so old, over whose head had passed so many fleeting seasons, which seemed to her now as short as days. In the little hamlets, around the huts with their dark, crumbling walls, were rosebushes, pinks, and gillyflowers; and even on the high roofs of thatch and moss, a thousand little blossoms attracted the first white butterflies.

This spring was almost without love, in this country of Icelanders; and the lovely daughters of a proud race, seen dreaming in the doorways, seemed to be gazing with their brown or blue eyes far away beyond visible things. The young men to whom their hearts went out in melancholy yearning were away on the great fishing cruise, off in the hyperborean sea.

But it was springtime, nevertheless, — warm, mild, agitating, with the faint humming of flies, odors of young plants.

And all this, so soulless, went on smiling at this old grandmother, walking as fast as she could go to be informed of the death of her last grandson. She was close upon the terrible moment when this thing, which had happened so far away on the China Sea, was about to be told to her. She was taking the

ill-fated walk which Sylvestre, as he was dying, had foreseen, and which had wrung from him his last tears of anguish: his good old grandmother summoned to the *Inscription* in Paimpol to learn that he was dead! He had seen her very clearly passing along the road, walking fast, erect, with her little brown shawl, her umbrella, and her big head-dress. And this apparition had made him lift himself up and writhe in frightful pain, while the enormous red sun of the equator, which was setting so magnificently, came in through the port-hole of the hospital to see him die.

Only, over there in his last vision, he had fancied the poor old woman taking this walk in the rain instead of in the gay, mocking spring sunshine.

As she approached Paimpol, she grew more uneasy, and hurried along still faster.

There she was in the gray town, in the little streets with their stone houses, where the sunshine was falling, greeting other old women, her contemporaries, sitting at their windows. Perplexed at seeing her, they said, —

"Where is she going like that, so fast, in her Sunday dress on a week-day?"

The agent of the *Inscription* was not in. An ugly little fellow, about fifteen years old, his clerk, was sitting at his desk. Being too small for a fisherman, he had been educated, and, wearing false black cuffs, spent his days in this same chair, scratching with his pen.

When she told him her name, he rose with an air of importance, and took some stamped packages from a pigeon-hole.

There were several. What did it mean? Certificates, papers bearing seals, a sailor's account-book, grown yellow from the sea, — all this having a death-like odor.

He spread them out before the poor old woman. She began to tremble and to suspect trouble; for she recognized two of the letters Gaud had written for her to her grandson, and they had come back unopened. The same thing had happened twenty years before, when her son Pierre died; his letters had come back from China to the agent, who had returned them to her.

He then read, in a doctoral voice, —

"Moan, Jean-Marie-Sylvestre, enrolled at Paimpol, folio 213, matriculation number 2091, deceased on board the *Bien-Hoa*, the 14th . . ."

"What? What has happened to him, my good sir?"

"Deceased! . . . He is deceased," he replied.

This clerk was not really cruel; it was rather from want of judgment, because his little dwarfed soul lacked intelligence, that he said this in such a brutal manner. And, seeing that she did not understand this high-sounding word, he expressed it in Breton, —

"*Marw éo!*"

"*Marw éo!*" (He is dead), she repeated after him, in the trembling voice of old age, as a poor, feeble echo repeats some indifferent phrase.

To be sure, she had already half divined the truth, but it only made her tremble; now that she was sure of it, it did not seem to affect her. In the first place, her power of suffering had really become a little blunted, on account of her age, especially during the last winter. Grief did not come at once. And then something for the moment went wrong in her head, and she confused this death with others: she had lost so many of them, so many sons! It took her a moment to fully realize that this was her last, so beloved, — the one who was the object of all her prayers, all her life, all her waiting, all her thoughts, already darkened by the melancholy approach of second childhood.

She felt ashamed to show her despair before this little man, who was an object of horror to her. Was this the way to announce the death of a grandson to his grandmother? She remained standing in front of the desk, rigid, twisting the fringe of her brown shawl with her poor old hands, chapped from washing.

And how far from home she felt! What a distance she had to go, and in a decent fashion, before she could reach the thatched roof, where she longed to shut herself in, like some wounded animal that hides in the ground to die! This was another

reason why she tried not to think too much, not to realize it yet, overcome by the thought of the long journey.

They gave her an order to allow her, as heir, to receive the thirty francs coming to her from the sale of Sylvestre's bag, then the letters, the certificates, and the box containing the military medal. She took all these awkwardly with her fingers, which remained open, and passed them from one hand to the other, unable to find her pocket to put them in.

In Paimpol she went along, looking straight before her, without seeing any one, a little bent forward, as if she were going to fall, and with a buzzing in her ears, and hurrying, urging herself on, like some poor old machine that has been set going with all speed for the last time, regardless of breaking the springs.

At the third kilometer she walked all bent over, exhausted. Now and then her sabot would hit against some stone, which would jar her head painfully; and she hastened to get home for fear of falling and having to be carried. . . .

## VI.

"Old Yvonne is tipsy!"

She fell down, and the boys in the street ran after her. It was just as she was entering the district of Ploubazlanec, where there are a great many houses

along the road. She had strength enough to get up and hobble away with her stick.

"Old Yvonne is tipsy!"

And the saucy little rascals came and laughed in her face. Her head-dress was all awry.

Some of these little boys were not bad at heart; and when they came close to her and saw the look of despair in her aged face, they turned away, saddened and touched, without daring to say another word.

As soon as she reached home and had closed the door, she gave vent to the feelings which were stifling her in a cry of distress, and dropped into a corner, with her head against the wall. Her head-dress had fallen over her eyes; she threw it on the floor,—her poor best head-dress, which she had always been so careful of! Her last Sunday dress was all soiled; and a lock of yellowish-white hair escaping from her head-band gave the last touch to the poor woman's disorderly appearance.

## VII.

GAUD, who had come to inquire about her, found her that evening without her head-dress, her arms hanging down, her head against the wall, her face distorted, and sobbing plaintively like a little child. She was hardly able to cry; very aged grandmothers have no tears in their exhausted eyes.

"My grandson is dead!"

And she threw the letters, the papers, and the medal into her lap.

Gaud glanced over them, saw that it was really true, and knelt down to pray.

The two women remained there together, almost dumb, while the June twilight lasted, — and it is very long in Brittany, and yonder in Iceland it never ends. On the hearth the cricket, which brings good luck, was making his shrill music for them all the same; and the yellow evening light came in through the window into this hut of the Moans, whom the sea had all taken away, who were now an extinct family. . . .

Finally Gaud said, —

"I will come to live with you, dear grandmother. I will bring my bed, which they have spared me, and I will take care of you; I will watch over you; you shall not be all alone. . . ."

She mourned for her little friend Sylvestre; but in her grief she felt her thoughts wander involuntarily to another, — one who had gone on the great fishing expedition.

They would send word to Yann that Sylvestre was dead. The *chasseurs* would soon be starting. Would he weep? Perhaps so, for he loved him well. . . . And in the midst of her own tears she was preoccupied with this, — sometimes indignant with the hard-hearted fellow, sometimes relenting on account

of the grief he was going to feel also, and which was a sort of bond of sympathy between the two; in fact, her heart was full of him.

## VIII.

One pale evening in August, the letter announcing to Yann the death of his brother at last reached the *Marie* on the Iceland sea. It was after a day of hard work and excessive fatigue, just as he was going below for supper and sleep. He read it with eyes heavy with drowsiness, in the gloomy cabin, by the yellow light of the little lamp; and for the first moment he too was insensible, stunned, like one who does not fully understand. Very reserved, through pride, about everything concerning his heart, he hid the letter in his blue jacket next his breast, as sailors are wont to do, and said nothing.

However, he no longer felt like sitting down with the others to eat his supper; so, scorning even to give them any explanation, he threw himself into his berth, and immediately fell asleep.

Soon he was dreaming of Sylvestre's death and burial. . . .

Near midnight, being in the state of mind peculiar to sailors, who are conscious of time in their sleep, and feel the approach of the moment when they will be called for the watch, he saw the burial again; and he said, —

"I am dreaming; fortunately they are going to wake me, and it will vanish."

But when a rough hand was laid on him, and a voice began to say: "Gaos! get up, it's your watch!" he heard a slight rustling of paper against his breast, — ominous music, confirming the reality of that death-scene. "Oh, yes, the letter! It was true, then!" and the impression grew sharper, more cruel; and rising quickly, after this sudden awakening, he hit his broad forehead against the beams.

Then he dressed, and opened the hatchway to go on deck to take his turn at the fishing.

## IX.

When Yann reached the deck, he saw all around him, with his eyes, which were not yet awake, the great familiar circle of the sea.

That night it was immensity presented under its most astonishingly simple aspect, in neutral tints, giving the impression alone of profundity.

The horizon, which indicated no precise region on the globe, nor even any particular geological age, must have been many times the same since the beginning of the centuries; for looking at it, it really seemed as if there was nothing to be seen, — nothing but the eternity of things which *are* and can never help *being*.

It was not even absolutely dark. It was feebly lighted by a remnant of light, which came from nowhere. It roared as usual, uttering an aimless complaint. It was gray, of a dim elusive gray. The sea, during its times of mysterious rest and sleep, is deceptive, under its unobtrusive, nameless tints.

Clouds were scattered above; they had assumed some shape, because things cannot be without it; in the darkness, they mingled in such a way as to form almost one great veil.

But in one particular spot in the sky, very low near the water, they formed a more distinct marbling, although very distant, — an indefinite design, as if traced by some unguided hand; a chance combination, not intended to be seen, fleeting, ready to fade away. And this alone, in all this *ensemble*, seemed to have a significance; it seemed as if the melancholy, indefinite meaning of all this nothingness was written there, where his eyes finally rested involuntarily.

As Yann's wandering eyes became accustomed to the darkness outside, they returned again and again to this unique mottled appearance of the sky; it assumed the shape of some one sinking down, with both arms outstretched. And now that he had begun to see this appearance, it seemed to him that it was a real human spirit, exaggerated, made gigantic by coming from afar.

Then in his imagination, where inexpressible dreams and primitive beliefs floated together, this melancholy shade, sinking down on the edge of this dark sky, gradually mingled with the memory of his dead brother, like a last manifestation of him.

He was accustomed to strange imaginary associations, such as are formed in early life in the minds of children. But words, vague as they may be, are still too exact to express these things; it needs the uncertain language which is sometimes spoken in dreams, only enigmatical, senseless fragments of which are retained on awaking.

As he watched this cloud, he felt a deep, painful sadness, full of strangeness and mystery, which froze his very soul; he now realized, more fully than before, that he would never see his poor little brother again, never again. The grief, which had been slow to penetrate the strong, hard covering of his heart, now filled it to overflowing. He saw again Sylvestre's sweet face, his kind, childlike eyes. At the thought of clasping him in his arms, something like a veil fell suddenly over his eyes in spite of him; and at first he could not understand what it was, never having wept since he had grown to be a man. But the tears began to flow thick and fast over his cheeks; and then his deep chest was convulsed with sobs.

He went on fishing very fast, without losing any time or saying a word; and the other two, who were

listening to him in the silence, pretended not to hear him, for fear of irritating him, knowing how reserved and proud he was.

According to his own idea, death ended all.

Out of respect, he had been in the habit of joining in the prayers for the deceased, said in the family; but he did not believe in the future life.

When the sailors talked together, they said all this in a decided, assured manner, as something well known of each. This, however, did not prevent a vague dread of ghosts, an indistinct fear of cemeteries, the greatest confidence in the saints and protecting images, nor, above all, an innate veneration for the sacred ground surrounding churches.

So Yann stood in fear of being lost at sea, as if that was more annihilating than anything else; and the thought that Sylvestre was left over there in that far-off land, on the other side of the world, made his grief blacker, more despairing.

Scorning the others, as he did, he wept without any restraint or shame, as if he had been alone.

Outside, the great void was slowly growing light, although it was hardly two o'clock; and at the same time, it seemed to stretch away farther and farther, becoming more measureless and frightfully hollow. With this kind of dawn which was approaching, the eyes opened wider, and the mind, more aroused, had a better conception of the immensity of distances; the limits of visible space were still farther removed, and always retreating.

It was a very pale light; but it kept increasing. It seemed as if it came in little streams, by slight shocks; the everlasting things seemed to be illumined through transparency as if white-flamed lamps had been gradually lifted behind the shapeless gray clouds, — lifted carefully, with mysterious precaution, for fear of disturbing the melancholy repose of the sea.

Below the horizon, the great white lamp was the sun, which was creeping feebly along before making its slow, cold journey, begun so early in the morning, above the waters.

That morning there were no rosy tints of dawn to be seen anywhere; everything remained pale and wan. And on board the *Marie* a man was weeping, — the strong Yann.

The tears of his fierce brother, and the excessive melancholy outside, was the mourning displayed for the poor little obscure hero on these Iceland seas, where he had spent half of his life.

When it was broad daylight, Yann suddenly wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his woollen shirt, and wept no more; it was over. He seemed wholly restored by the labor of fishing, by the monotonous course of real, present events, as if he had no more thoughts about anything.

Moreover, the lines were very active, and his arms were hardly equal to them.

Around the fishermen, in the vast background,

there was a new change of scene. The great display of infinity, the great spectacle of the morning, was over; and now the distance seemed, on the contrary, to contract, to close over the waters. How was it that the sea had just before seemed so measureless? The horizon was now quite near, and it even seemed as if there was lack of room. Space was filled with thin floating veils, some more indistinct than the clouds; others, the shapes of which could almost be made out and seemed, as it were, fringed. They fell softly, in great silence, like white gauze, having no weight; but they were falling everywhere at the same time, so that they were quickly imprisoned underneath, and it was oppressive to see the respirable air thus encumbered.

It was the first fog of August coming up. In a few moments the shroud was uniformly dense, impenetrable around the *Marie;* nothing could be seen but a moist pallor, through which the light was diffused, and in which even the masts of the vessel seemed to be lost.

"Here comes the nasty fog," said the men. They had long known this inevitable companion of the second period of the fishing; but also it announced the end of the season in Iceland, the time for them to start on their way back to Brittany.

It settled in fine, sparkling drops on their beards; it made their sunburned skin shine with moisture. As they looked at one another from opposite ends

of the vessel, they appeared as shadowy as ghosts; on the other hand, objects very near seemed exaggerated in this dull whitish light. The men took care not to breathe with open mouths; a sensation of cold and dampness penetrated their lungs.

At the same time the fishing became more and more lively; and there was no more talking, the lines kept them so busy. Every instant large fishes were heard falling on board, thrown on the deck with the sound like that of a whip; afterward they wriggled furiously, flapping their tails against the woodwork. Everything was bespattered with sea-water and delicate silvery scales, which they threw off in their struggles. The sailor who opened them with his big knife, in his haste, cut his fingers, and his red blood mingled with the brine.

## X.

THIS time they remained ten successive days in the thick fog, without seeing anything. The fishing continued to be good; and with so much activity, they did not find it tedious. From time to time, at regular intervals, one of them would blow a horn, giving forth a noise like the bellowing of some wild beast.

Sometimes, out of the dense white fog, another distant bellowing would answer their call. Then they would be more watchful. If the sound came

nearer, all ears listened for this unknown neighbor, whom they would probably never see, and whose presence was nevertheless dangerous. They made conjectures about it; it became the subject of debate. And through their desire to see it, their eyes tried to penetrate the impalpable white gauze, everywhere spread through the air.

And as it moved away, the bellowing of its horn would cease in the dim distance; then they would be left alone in the silence, amid the infinity of motionless vapors. Everything was impregnated with water; everything was dripping with salt and brine. The cold became more penetrating, the sun lingered longer below the horizon; there were already real nights one or two hours long, the gray approach of which was gloomy and frigid.

Every morning they sounded the depth of the water, fearing that the *Marie* might venture too near the island of Iceland. But all the lines on board, fastened together, did not reach the bed of the ocean; so they were well out to sea, and in good deep water.

Their life was healthful and rough. The piercing cold increased their comfort in the evening, — the warm home feeling they experienced in the cabin of heavy oak, when they went below for their supper or for sleep.

In the daytime these men, who were more cloistered than monks, talked little with one another.

Each one, holding his line, remained for hours and hours at the same invariable post, his arms alone occupied with the incessant labor of fishing. They were only two or three yards apart, and they came at last not to see one another.

The calmness of the fog, the white obscurity, put their minds to sleep. As they fished, they would hum to themselves some national air, in a low voice, for fear of frightening away the fishes. Thoughts came more slowly and more seldom; they seemed to be distended, lengthened out, in order to fill the time without leaving any gaps, any intervals of nonentity. They had not the least thought of women, because it was still cold; but their minds were filled with incoherent or marvellous fancies, as in sleep, and the woof of these fancies was as uncondensed as fog. . . .

This foggy month of August usually ended the season in Iceland every year, in a melancholy, quiet manner. Moreover, there was always the same plenitude of physical life expanding the sailors' lungs and toughening their muscles.

Yann had immediately recovered his ordinary behavior, as if his grief had come to an end,— watchful and alert, ready for working the vessel or for fishing, with an easy carriage, as if free from care; moreover, communicative when he chose to be, which was seldom, and always carrying his head high with an indifferent, lordly air.

That evening, when they were at supper, with some good hot dish before them, in the shabby abode protected by the faïence Virgin, he laughed, as he had formerly done, at the others' jokes.

Perhaps he was thinking a little of Gaud, whom Sylvestre, in his last dying thoughts, had probably wished him to have for his wife, and who had become a poor girl now, without a friend in the world. Perhaps, more than all, his grief for his brother still lingered in the depths of his heart.

But this heart of Yann's was a pure spot, difficult to manage, little understood, where many things went on which were not revealed outside.

## XI.

One morning about three o'clock, while they were quietly dreaming under their shroud of fog, they heard voices which seemed strange and unfamiliar. Those who were on deck looked at each other inquiringly.

"Who was that speaking?"

No! no one; no one had said anything.

And, indeed, it had really seemed to come from the space beyond.

Then the one who had charge of the horn, and had neglected it since the day before, rushed to get it, and blew with all his might to give the long bellow of alarm.

This alone made them tremble in the silence. And then as if, on the contrary, an apparition had been evoked by the vibrating sound of the horn, a great object unexpectedly stood out in the grayness, towered threateningly very high, close to them, — masts, yards, rigging, the form of a vessel in the air, all at once and suddenly like those startling dissolving views, which are cast on screens with a single ray of light. And other men appeared there, within reach, bending over the side, looking at them with wide-open eyes in surprised, terrified alarm. . . .

They seized the oars, the spare masts, gaffs, — everything long and strong that could be found on board, — and pointed them outside to keep at a distance this thing and these visitors who had appeared. And the others, also alarmed, pushed out toward them enormous sticks to keep them off with.

But there was only a slight creaking of the yards above their heads; and the masts, for a moment caught together, were immediately disentangled without any injury. The shock, which was very slight because the waters were calm, was entirely broken; it was so faint that it really seemed as if the other vessel had no substance, and as if it were something soft, almost imponderable.

Then, after the collision, the men began to laugh. Some of them recognized one another: —

"Holloa, on board the *Marie!*"

"Oho! Gaos, Laumec, Guermeur!"

The apparition was the *Reine-Berthe*, Captain Larvoër, also from Paimpol; the sailors were from the villages near by. The tall one, with the black beard, showing his teeth when he laughed, was Kerjégou, from Ploudaniel; and the others came from Plounès or Plounérin.

"Why didn't you blow your horn, you band of savages?" asked Larvoër of the *Reine-Berthe*.

"Well, why didn't you, you band of pirates and corsairs, *bad poison* of the sea?"

"Oh, with us it is different; *we are not allowed to make any noise*." (He said this with an air of referring to some black mystery; with a droll smile, which afterward often recurred to the minds of those on the *Marie*, and gave them much to think about.)

And then, as if he had said too much, he ended with this joke, —

"That fellow there burst our horn by blowing into it."

And he pointed to a sailor with a triton's face, who was all neck and chest, and too broad, short on his legs, with a strange grotesqueness, and distressing in his gigantic deformity. And while they were looking at each other, expecting some breeze or current from beneath to carry one on more swiftly than the other, to separate the vessels, they engaged in conversation. All, leaning over the side, keeping themselves apart with their long wooden poles, just as besiegers would have done with their pikes, talked about the news

from home, the last letters brought by the *chasseurs*, their aged parents and their wives.

"My wife," said Kerjégou, "informs me that she has just had the little one we were expecting; that makes a dozen that we have now."

Another one had had twins, and a third announced the marriage of the handsome Jeannie Caroff — a girl who was very well known among the Icelanders — with a certain feeble, rich old man in the district of Plourivo.

They appeared as if they were looking at each other through white gauze, and it seemed to change also the tone of their voices, which sounded muffled and far away.

Yann could not keep his eyes away from one of the fishermen, a somewhat oldish little man, whom he was sure that he had never seen before, but who had at once said, "Holloa, my big Yann!" with an air of familiarity. He was irritatingly ugly, like a monkey, with the same malicious blinking in his piercing eyes.

"I hear," said Larvoër, of the *Reine-Berthe*, "that old Yvonne Moan's grandson, of Ploubazlanec, who was serving in the navy, as you know, in the Chinese squadron, is dead. That 's a great pity!"

Hearing this, the other men on the *Marie* turned toward Yann, to see if he already knew of this misfortune.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, in an indifferent

haughty manner; "it was in the last letter my father sent me."

They all looked at him, out of curiosity concerning his grief, and it annoyed him.

Their remarks flew rapidly back and forth through the pale fog, while the moments of their strange interview were passing.

"My wife also told me," continued Larvoër, "that M. Mével's daughter has left the town to live in Ploubazlanec and take care of old Moan, her great-aunt; she goes out to work by the day now to earn her living. After all, I always thought she was a good girl, and one of character, in spite of her airs like a fine young lady and her furbelows."

Then they looked at Yann again, which displeased him still more; and a deep flush showed through the golden brown of his tanned cheeks.

With these appreciative words about Gaud, the conversation came to an end with these people on the *Reine-Berthe*, whom no living person was ever to see again. In a moment their faces grew indistinct, for their vessel was retreating; and suddenly the men on the *Marie* found there was nothing to push, nothing at the end of their long pieces of wood; all their spars, oars, masts, or yards moved about inquiringly in the air, and then dropped, one after another, heavily into the sea, like great lifeless arms. They hauled in the now useless defences; the *Reine-Berthe*, having plunged back into the thick

fog, had disappeared suddenly and entirely, as a picture is effaced from a transparency, behind which the lamp has been extinguished. They tried to hail her, but there was no response to their calls, except a mocking sound of several voices, ending in groans which made them look at one another in surprise.

The *Reine-Berthe* did not return with the other Icelanders; and as the men on the *Samuel-Azénide* had come across an unmistakable sign of a wreck in one of the fiords (her taffrail with a portion of her keel), they gave her up; in the month of October the names of all her sailors were inscribed on black tablets in the church.

From the time of this apparition, the date of which was well remembered by those on board the *Marie*, until their return, there was no dangerous weather on the sea of Iceland, while, three weeks previous, a squall from the west had carried away several sailors and two vessels. They remembered Larvoër's smile; and, as they thought over all these things, they made many conjectures. Yann recalled, more than once at night, the sailor who blinked like a monkey; and there were some on the *Marie* who asked themselves timidly whether they had not talked that morning with the dead.

## XII.

THE summer was passing away, and the last of August the Icelanders returned at the same time as the morning fogs.

For three months the two bereaved women had been living together in Ploubazlanec, in the Moans' cottage. Gaud had taken the place of a daughter in this poor deserted nest of lost sailors. She had brought there everything they had left her after the sale of her father's house, — her beautiful bed, in city style, and her fine gowns of different colors. She had made her new black dress herself, in a more simple fashion, and, like old Yvonne, wore a mourning cap of thick muslin trimmed only with folds.

Every day she went to sew for the rich people in the town, and came back at night without being troubled on the way by any admirers, for she remained a little distant, and still commanded the respect due a young lady. As they said "Good-evening," the boys touched their caps as they had formerly done.

In the beautiful summer twilight, she used to come back from Paimpol along the road on the cliff, breathing the fresh, tranquil sea air. She had not worked with the needle long enough to grow out of shape, like others who spend their lives bending over their work. And as she looked at the sea, she

straightened up her fine supple figure which she had inherited, — as she looked at the sea, as she looked out into the offing, far beyond which Yann was sailing.

This same road led to his house. A little farther along, toward a more rocky region and more exposed to the winds, was the hamlet of Pors-Even, where the trees, covered with gray moss, grow very small between the rocks, and bend in the same direction as the squalls from the west. She would probably never go again to Pors-Even, although it was less than a league distant; but once in her life she had gone there, and that had been enough to leave a charm all along the way. Moreover, Yann would often pass over it; and, from her door, she would be able to watch him going or coming over the level country, among the short broom. So she loved this region of Ploubazlanec. She was almost happy because fate had brought her here; in no other spot in the country could she have made up her mind to live.

At this season, the last of August, there is a sort of languor in the atmosphere, as in a warm country; it comes up from the south toward the north. There are luminous evenings; there are reflections of that mighty, distant sun, which comes even as far as the Breton coast. Often the air is clear and calm, without a cloud anywhere.

At the time when Gaud was on her way home,

objects were beginning to blend as they do at night, to run together and form silhouettes. Here and there a clump of broom would stand out on an elevation between two rocks, like a disordered bunch of feathers; a group of gnarled trees would form a dark mass in some hollow, or perhaps in another spot a hamlet with its thatched roofs would form a humpbacked outline above the moor. At the cross-ways, the old figures of Christ, watching over the country, stretched out their black arms on the crosses, like veritable executed men; and in the distance the Channel was clearly seen, like a great yellow mirror contrasting with the sky, which was already dark near the horizon. But in this country, even this calmness, even this beautiful weather, was melancholy; in spite of all, a restlessness hovered over everything; an anxiety came from the sea, to which so many lives had been intrusted, and the everlasting menace of which was only sleeping.

Gaud, dreaming as she went along, never found the walk home in the fresh air half long enough. A salt smell came from the beaches, and a sweet fragrance from certain flowers growing on the cliffs among the leafless thorns. If it had not been for Grandmother Yvonne, who was waiting for her at home, she would have gladly lingered in these paths among the broom, like the fine young ladies who love to dream dreams on summer evenings in the gardens.

As she passed through this region, many recollections of her childhood came back to her; but how dim, far away, and unimportant her love now made them seem! In spite of all, she liked to consider Yann as a sort of lover, — a distant, scornful, fierce lover, who would never belong to her; but to whom she persisted in remaining faithful in spirit, without confiding it to any one. For the time being, she liked to know he was in Iceland; there, at least, the sea kept him in its deep cloisters, and he could not give himself to any one else.

To be sure, one of these days he would return; but she thought of this fact more calmly than before. She knew instinctively that her poverty would not be a reason for his being more disdainful, because he was not like other fellows. And then the death of little Sylvestre was something which certainly drew them together. When he returned, he could not fail to come under their roof to see his friend's grandmother; and she had decided that she would be there when he came; it did not seem to her that it would be undignified. Without appearing to remember anything that had happened, she would speak to him as if she had known him a long time; she would even speak affectionately, as if he were Sylvestre's brother, and try to seem quite natural. And who knows? It might not be impossible for her to take the place of a sister, now that she was so alone in the world; to rely upon his

friendship, to ask this of him as a help, explaining herself sufficiently for him to feel that she had no hidden thought of marriage. She believed him to be rough, obstinate in his ideas of independence, but gentle, frank, and quite capable of understanding the good qualities coming straight from the heart.

How would he feel when he found her there, poor, living in this hut almost in ruins? Very poor! Ah, yes! for Grandmother Moan, no longer strong enough to go out washing by the day, had nothing but her widow's pension; to be sure, she ate very little now, and both of them could still manage to live without asking any assistance.

It was always dark when she reached home. Before entering, it was necessary to step down over the worn rocks, as the hut was below the level of the Ploubazlanec road, on the side which sloped down toward the beach. It was almost hidden under its thick brown thatched roof, all out of shape, resembling the back of some enormous dead animal, weighed down by its heavy fur. Its walls were dark-colored and rough like the rocks, covered with moss and cochlearia, forming little green tufts. She went up the three hollowed steps to the threshold and opened the inside latch of the door by means of a piece of rope which came through a hole. On entering, the first thing you saw in front of you was a window, like an opening in the thickness of a rampart, and looking out on the sea, from which came a

last gleam of pale yellow light. In the great fireplace were burning fragrant branches of pine and beechwood, which old Yvonne gathered in her walks along the roads; she herself was sitting there, looking after their little supper. In the house she wore merely a head-band, to save her caps; her profile, still pretty, stood out against the red firelight. She looked up at Gaud, with her eyes, which had once been brown, but now were faded with a bluish tinge in them, with the anxious, uncertain, wild expression of old age. She always said the same thing:—

"Dear me, my good girl, how late you are this evening!"

"Oh, no, grandmother!" gently replied Gaud, accustomed to this remark; "it is the same time that I come every evening."

"Ah! . . . It seems to me, daughter, it seems to me that it is later than usual."

They took their supper on a table, which had become almost shapeless from much use, but was still thick like the trunk of an oak. And the cricket never failed to begin his little silvery-toned song for them.

One side of the hut was occupied by rudely carved wainscotings, now all worm-eaten; when opened they gave access to bunks, one above another, where several generations of fishermen had been begotten, had slept, and where their aged mothers had died.

From the black beams of the roof hung very

ancient cooking utensils, bundles of herbs, wooden spoons, smoked bacon, and also old nets, which had been left there ever since the last Moan sons were shipwrecked, and the meshes of which were gnawed by rats at night.

Gaud's bed, with its white muslin curtains, standing in a corner, looked singularly elegant and new in this Celtic hut.

A photograph of Sylvestre as a sailor, in a frame, hung on the stone wall. His grandmother had fastened his military medal to it, with a pair of the red cloth anchors, such as sailors wear on the right sleeve, and which had belonged to him. Gaud had also bought, in Paimpol, one of those funeral wreaths of black and white beads which, in Brittany, they put around the pictures of the deceased. This formed his little mausoleum, — all that there was to perpetuate his memory in his Breton home.

Summer evenings they went to bed early to economize light; when the weather was fine, they would sit for a few moments on a stone seat in front of the house and watch the people passing along the road, a little above their heads.

Then old Yvonne would go to her bunk and Gaud to her fashionable bed; there she would quickly fall asleep, after working hard and walking far, and dream of the Icelanders' return, like a good, resolute girl, without anything too serious on her mind.

## XIII.

But one day, in Paimpol, hearing that the *Marie* had just come in, she felt as if a sort of fever had seized her. All the calmness she had shown while waiting had left her. Having hurried to finish her work, without knowing why, she started home earlier than usual; and on the way, as she was hastening along, she recognized him in the distance, coming toward her.

Her knees trembled, and she felt them giving way. He was already quite near, scarcely twenty steps distant, with his superb figure, his curly hair under his fisherman's cap. She was taken so unawares by this meeting that she was really afraid of staggering, and that he would notice it; she was ready to die of shame. . . . And, besides, she felt that she had on an old head-dress, and that she must look tired after hurrying so fast to finish her work; she would have given anything to hide herself in the clumps of broom, to disappear in some marten's hole. Moreover, he, too, started back, as if to go in some other direction, but it was too late: they passed each other in the narrow path.

In order not to touch her, he stepped aside on the bank, starting like a skittish horse shying at something, and looked at her furtively and timidly.

She, too, had raised her eyes for half a second, giving him, in spite of herself, a beseeching look full

of distress. And in this involuntary exchange of glances, swifter than a gunshot, her violet eyes seemed to grow larger, to be illumined with some great blaze of thought, to emit a truly bluish light, while her face grew all rosy up to her temples, even under her fair tresses.

He said, as he touched his cap, —

"Good-evening, Mademoiselle Gaud."

"Good-evening, Monsieur Yann," she replied.

And this was all; he had passed on. She continued her way, still trembling; but as she felt the distance gradually increase between them, her blood began to circulate again, and her strength returned.

When she reached home, she found the old grandmother sitting in a corner, with her head in her hands, weeping, whimpering like a little child, her dishevelled hair tumbled down from under her headband, like a thin skein of hemp.

"Ah, my dear Gaud! I met son Gaos near Plouherzel, just as I was returning from gathering my wood; then, you may be sure, we had a talk about my poor little boy. They came in this morning from Iceland, and about noon he came to see me while I was out. Poor fellow, there were tears in his eyes, too! He came back to the very door with me, my dear Gaud, to carry my little bundle of fagots for me."

She listened to this standing, and her heart became

heavier and heavier. So this visit of Yann's, on which she had counted so much to tell him so many things, had already been made, and would probably not be repeated; it was over. . . .

Then the hut seemed more desolate to her, their poverty harder, the world more empty; and she bowed her head, longing to die.

## XIV.

WINTER came on gradually, spreading out like a shroud, very slowly let down. Gray days succeeded gray days, but Yann did not come again, and the two women lived quite deserted.

With the cold weather their life was more expensive and harder to bear.

And then the old Yvonne grew more difficult to take care of; her poor mind was affected. She would get angry now, and would say spiteful, disagreeable things; once or twice a week she would have these turns, like children, for no reason at all.

Poor old woman! . . . She was still so sweet on her good, bright days, that Gaud did not cease to respect her and love her. To have always been so good and to end by being so bad; to show at the last such a vein of malice, which had all her life lain dormant; such a knowledge of coarse words, which had been concealed, — what a derision of the soul, and what a mocking mystery!

She began to sing also, and this was still worse to hear than her angry words. She sang about anything that chanced to come into her head, — an *oremus* from a Mass, or vile couplets which she had formerly heard repeated by the sailors in the harbor. Sometimes she would strike up the "Little Girls of Paimpol;" or, swaying her head and beating time with her foot, she would begin: —

"My husband has gone away;
To fish in Iceland, my husband has gone away.
He left me without a sou.
But trala, trala, la lou!
I'll earn enough!
I'll earn enough!"

Each time she would stop short, opening her eyes very wide, staring into vacancy, and losing all expression of life, — like dying flames, which blaze up suddenly and then go out. Afterward she would bow her head and remain for a long time in a stupor, with her jaw dropping as if she were dead.

Moreover, she was not very neat, and this was a kind of trial which Gaud had not expected.

One day she could not remember her grandson.

"Sylvestre? Sylvestre?" she said to Gaud, as if she were trying to think who it could be. "Well, my dear, you know I had so many boys and girls when I was young; girls and boys — that now, — dear me! . . ."

And as she said this, she threw up her poor

wrinkled hands with an air of almost reckless indifference.

The next day she remembered him well enough, and wept all day long, as she told of a thousand little things he had done or said.

Oh, the winter evenings, when there was no wood to make a fire! When she had to work, although she was cold, — work to earn her living, doing fine sewing; having to finish, before she slept, the work she brought home from Paimpol every evening.

Grandmother Yvonne would sit quietly by the fire, with her feet against the last embers, her hands folded under her apron. But early in the evening Gaud always had to talk with her.

"You don't say anything, my dear girl; why is it? In my time, I knew people of your age who knew how to talk. It seems to me that we should not seem so melancholy if you would talk a little."

Then Gaud would tell whatever news she had heard in the town, or name the people she had met on the road, — talk of things which were quite indifferent to her, as well as everything else in the world just now; then she would stop in the middle of her stories, when she saw the old woman had gone to sleep.

Nothing living, nothing young around her, though her fresh youth demanded youth. Her beauty was to be wasted in solitude and unfruitfulness.

The wind from the sea, which came in everywhere, blew her lamp, and the noise of the waves sounded as it does on board a vessel; and as she listened to it, she mingled with it the ever present, painful thoughts of Yann, whose domain all these things were. On nights of frightful storms, when everything was raging and howling in the darkness outside, her distress of mind was still greater as she thought of him.

And then being alone, always alone, with the grandmother asleep, she sometimes felt afraid, and looked into the dark corners, thinking about the sailors, her ancestors, who had slept in these bunks, who had perished at sea on such nights as these, and whose souls might return; she did not feel that the presence of this aged woman, who was almost one of them, protected her from a visit from these deceased mariners. . . .

Suddenly she would begin to tremble from head to foot, as she heard a little slender, broken, flute-like voice, sounding as if it were smothered underground, come from a corner of the fireplace. In a lively tone, which chilled her soul, the voice would sing, —

"My husband has gone to fish in Iceland.
He left me without a sou;
But trala, trala, la lou. . . ."

And then she experienced the peculiar kind of fright such as is caused by the presence of insane people.

The rain kept falling, with the incessant sound of a fountain; she heard it running down almost continually over the walls outside. In the old mossy roof there were leaks through which, always in the same places, the untiring, monotonous dripping of water made the same melancholy tinkling; it wet the floor of the house in places, — this floor was composed of stones, beaten earth, gravel, and shells.

You could feel the water all around; it enveloped you with its cold, wide-spreading mass. Never resting, lashing the house, crumbling into mist, deepening the darkness, and making the cottages, scattered through the region of Ploubazlanec, seem more isolated from one another.

Sunday evenings were the most gloomy for Gaud, on account of a certain gayety which they brought to other places. There were merry-makings even in these little remote hamlets on the coast. There was always, in one place or another, some closed hut, beaten by the dark rain, from which came the sound of loud singing. Within there were rows of tables for the drinkers, sailors drying themselves by smoking fires, old men enjoying their brandy, young men flirting with the girls, — all on the way to intoxication, and singing to drown their thoughts. And, near by, the sea, their future tomb, was singing, too, filling the night with its immense voice.

On certain Sundays numbers of young men coming from these public-houses or returning from Paim-

pol, passed along the road near the Moans' door; they lived at the farthest end of the district, toward Pors-Even. They went by very late, after leaving the girls, indifferent to the rain, accustomed as they were to wind and waves. Gaud listened to their songs and shouts, quickly drowned by the sound of the blast or the sea, trying to distinguish Yann's voice, beginning to tremble when she fancied she recognized it.

It was too bad of Yann not to come to see them again, and to be leading such a merry life so soon after the death of Sylvestre; all this was so unlike him! No, she certainly did not understand it; and, in spite of it all, she could not forget him nor believe that he was heartless.

The fact was, that since his return his life had been very dissipated.

In the first place there had been the usual tour in the Gulf of Gascony, and that is always a time of enjoyment for the Icelanders, when they have a little money in their pockets to spend freely (small sums advanced for their amusement by the captain, on account, the profits from the fishing not coming due until winter).

They had gone, as they did every year, to buy salt among the islands, and he had fallen again in love with a certain brunette. Together they had walked, in the last gay sunshine, through the ruddy vineyards filled with the song of larks, fragrant with

ripe grapes, sand-pinks, and the sea smells from the shore; together they had sung and danced the round dances at the vintage reunions, where they get mildly and amorously intoxicated, drinking the sweet wine.

Then, the *Marie* having gone as far as Bordeaux, he had found again, in a large gilded tavern, the handsome singer who had given him the watch, and carelessly allowed himself to adore her for another week.

After returning to Brittany, in November, he took part in several weddings of friends as best man, always dressed in his best, and often intoxicated after midnight at the end of the ball. Every week some new adventure came to him, and the girls were ready to give an exaggerated account of it to Gaud.

Three or four times she had seen him in the distance, coming toward her, on the road to Ploubazlanec, but always in time to avoid him; he, too, moreover, at such times, went across the moor. As if by a silent understanding, they now shunned each other.

## XV.

In Paimpol, there is a stout woman called Madame Tressoleur. In one of the streets leading to the port she keeps a public-house, which is famous among the Icelanders, and where the captains and ship-

owners come to engage sailors, to take their choice of the strongest while they drink together.

Once handsome, and still a favorite with the fishermen, she now has a mustache, the broad shoulders of a man, and a bold manner. She looks like a *cantinière*, in her big white muslin cap. There is a singular religious air about her, in spite of everything, because she is a Breton woman.

She keeps the names of all the sailors in the region in her head, as if it were a register: she knows the good ones and the poor ones; she knows exactly what they earn and what they are worth.

One day in January, Gaud, having been engaged to make her a dress, came there to work, in a room back of the drinking saloon. . . .

The entrance to Dame Tressoleur's house is a door with massive stone pillars, set back under the second story, in old style; when it is opened, there is almost always a strong gust of wind in the street, which blows against it, and the visitors make a sudden entrance, as if they were hurled in by a billow of the sea. The hall is low and deep, whitewashed, and decorated with pictures in gilt frames of vessels, ships coming into port, wrecks. In one corner a faïence Virgin stands on a console, surrounded with bouquets of artificial flowers.

These old walls have listened to many a powerful sailor's song, have seen much loud, coarse gayety, from the remote past of Paimpol, through the troub-

lous days of the corsairs down to the Icelanders of our own time, not so different from their ancestors; and many lives of men have been played for, engaged there, between two intoxications, at these tables of oak.

As Gaud was sewing on the dress, she overheard a conversation about matters concerning Iceland, carried on between Madame Tressoleur and two frequenters, as they sat drinking, the other side of the partition.

The old men were discussing the subject of a fine new boat, which they were rigging in the harbor: this *Léopoldine* would never be ready for the next cruise.

"Oh, yes," retorted the hostess; "she will surely be ready! for I tell you that she engaged her crew yesterday, — all who were with Guermeur on the old *Marie*, which is going to be sold and taken to pieces. Five young men came to make their engagement here, before me, — at this table, — signed their names with my pen, thus! And they are fine fellows, I assure you, — Laumec, Tugdual Caroff, Yvon Duff, son Keraez, from Tréguier; and the big Yann Gaos from Pors-Even, who is well worth any three!"

The *Léopoldine!* The name, which had hardly reached her ears, of this boat which was going to carry Yann away, was at once fixed in Gaud's memory as if it had been hammered in to make it more indelible.

That evening, after she had returned to Ploubazlanec, as she sat finishing her work by the light of her little lamp, she found this word, the mere sound of which made her feel melancholy, still running in her mind. The names of persons and those of vessels have an individuality of their own, — one might almost say a soul. And this *Léopoldine*, a new, unfamiliar word, followed her with an unnatural persistency, became a sort of evil obsession. No; she had expected Yann to go away again on the *Marie*, which she had once visited, and felt acquainted with, and which the Virgin had protected for so many years of dangerous voyages; and now this change had come, this *Léopoldine*, increasing her distress.

But soon she said to herself that this had nothing to do with her, that nothing concerning him ought ever to affect her again. And, in reality, what difference could it make to her whether he was here or elsewhere, on board one vessel or another, gone away, or at home? Should she feel more unhappy or less so, when he had gone to Iceland; when the summer came back, warm, to the deserted homes, the solitary, anxious women; or even when another autumn began again, bringing the fishermen home once more? It was all the same to her, a matter of indifference to her, equally free as she was from joy and without hope. There was no tie between them now, no reason for a reconciliation, since he had

even forgotten the poor little Sylvestre; so it was best to realize that this one dream, this one desire of her life, was over forever. She must tear herself away entirely from Yann, from everything which had to do with his life; even from the name of Iceland, which still vibrated with such a painful charm, because of him. She must drive away these thoughts absolutely, sweep them away entirely; make up her mind that it was over, over forever.

She looked tenderly at the poor old woman asleep, who still had need of her, but had not long to live. And then, after she had gone, what would be the good of living, what would be the use of working, and what would she do?

The west wind had already risen outside; the roof began to leak again with a quiet, gentle sound, like toy bells, contrasting with the great roaring in the distance. And the tears of the deserted orphan girl began to flow, falling over her lips with a slightly bitter taste, dropping silently on her work like summer rain brought by no wind, and which comes down suddenly, fast and heavy, from the saturated clouds; then, unable to see any longer, feeling overwhelmed, bewildered by the empty life before her, she folded up Dame Tressoleur's ample waist, and tried to go to bed.

She shivered as she stretched herself out in her poor, fine-curtained bed; each day it grew damper and colder, — as well as everything else in the

hut. However, as she was very young, in the midst of her weeping she finally grew warm and went to sleep.

## XVI.

Several gloomy weeks had passed, and it was now the first of February, with fine, mild weather.

Yann was coming out of the shipowner's house, having just received his share of the profits from the previous summer's fishing, — fifteen hundred francs, — which he was going to carry to his mother, according to the family custom. The year had been a good one, and he was going home well satisfied.

Near Ploubazlanec, he saw a group of people on the side of the road, an old woman, gesticulating with her stick, and surrounded by boys who were laughing at her. Grandmother Moan! The good grandmother whom Sylvestre adored, all bedraggled and torn, now become a poor old imbecile, attracting a crowd on the road. This caused him intense pain.

These boys from Ploubazlanec had killed her cat, and she was threatening them with her stick, very angry and desperate, —

"Oh, if my poor boy were only here, you would not have dared to do so, I assure you, you little wretches!"

She had fallen down, it seemed, while running after them to beat them; her cap was on one side,

her dress covered with mud, and they were saying again that she was drunk (as is often the case in Brittany, with some poor old people who have had misfortunes).

Yann knew that this was not true, and that she was a respectable old woman who never drank anything but water.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," he said to the little scamps, very angry himself, in his impressive tone of voice.

And in a twinkling all the boys had disappeared, abashed and confused by the tall Yann.

Gaud, just returning from Paimpol with her work for the evening, had seen all this from a distance, and recognized her grandmother in the crowd. Feeling alarmed, she ran to find out what had happened, what was the matter with her, what they could have done to her; and, seeing their cat, which had been killed, she understood.

She lifted her frank eyes to Yann, and he did not turn his away. They did not think of avoiding each other this time; but both grew very rosy, he as quickly as she, the color rising to their cheeks simultaneously; and they looked at each other, somewhat intimidated to find themselves so near together, but without aversion, almost sweetly, united as they were by a common thought of pity and protection.

For a long time the school-children had had a grudge against this poor deceased cat, because he

had a black face and looked wicked; but he was a very good cat, and when seen near was found, on the contrary, to have a peaceful, playful manner. They had stoned him to death and put out his eye. The poor old woman, still muttering threats, and much distressed, went tottering along, carrying the dead cat by the tail like a rabbit.

"Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy! if he were still in this world they would not have dared to treat me so; no, indeed, they would not!"

She shed a kind of tears which fell into her wrinkles; and her hands, with their large blue veins, trembled.

Gaud had straightened her cap, and tried to comfort her with gentle words. And Yann was indignant. Was it possible that children could be so naughty! To do such a thing to a poor old woman! The tears almost came to his eyes also; not on account of the cat, of course not, — rough young men like him, although they may be fond of playing with animals, have no sentimentalism about them. But his heart was broken, as he walked behind this grandmother in her second childhood, carrying her poor cat by the tail. He thought of Sylvestre, who had loved her so well; of how dreadfully he would have felt if he had foreseen that she would end her days derided and in poverty.

And Gaud made excuses for her, as if she were responsible for her appearance.

"It is because she fell down that she is so dirty," she said, in a low voice. "Her dress is no longer new, it is true, because we are not rich, Monsieur Yann; but I mended it only yesterday, and this morning, when I went away, I am sure that she was clean and tidy."

He looked at her then for a long time, much more touched, perhaps, by this simple little explanation than he would have been by skilful phrases, reproaches, and tears. They continued walking side by side, as they approached the Moans' hut. He knew very well that she had always been as pretty as she could be, but it seemed to him that she was still more so since her poverty and her mourning. Her manner had grown more serious, the expression of her violet eyes more reserved, and, in spite of that, they seemed to penetrate farther, to the very bottom of one's soul. Her figure, too, was more developed. She would soon be twenty-three, and was in the full bloom of beauty.

And, moreover, now she was dressed like a fisherman's daughter, in a black dress without ornaments and a very plain head-dress, it was impossible to tell what made her seem so lady-like; it was something hidden in herself and unconscious, with which she could not be reproached. Perhaps it was only her waist, which fitted a little better than that of others, outlining better her full bust and her shoulders; but no, it was rather to be found in her quiet voice and in her eyes.

## XVII.

CERTAINLY he would accompany them, as far as their house, at least.

They all three went along together as if they were going to bury the cat, and it was almost a bit comical, now, to see them passing in a procession; it made the good people at their doors smile. Old Yvonne, in the middle, carried the animal; Gaud, at her right, anxious and still blushing; the tall Yann at her left, holding his head high and pensive.

However, the poor old woman was suddenly comforted on the way. She herself arranged her cap, and without saying another word, began to look first at one and then at the other out of the corner of her eye, which had become bright again.

Gaud did not speak again, lest Yann might take the opportunity to leave them; she would have liked to linger under the kind, tender look that he had given her, to walk with closed eyes, to see nothing else, to walk thus for a long, long time beside him in this dream, instead of coming so soon to their empty, gloomy hut, where it would all vanish away.

At the door there was one of those moments of uncertainty when it seems as if the heart would stop beating. The grandmother went straight into the house; then Gaud, hesitating; and Yann, behind them, entered also.

He was in their home for the first time in his life without any object, probably; what could he want? As he crossed the threshold, he touched his hat; and then his eyes falling on Sylvestre's picture, with its little mortuary wreath of black beads, he went toward it slowly, as if he were approaching a tomb.

Gaud remained standing, resting her hands on the table. He looked all around him, and she followed him as he made this sort of silent examination of their poverty. Very poor, indeed, in spite of its orderly, respectable appearance, was the home of these two deserted women, living together. Perhaps he might, at least, feel a little kindly pity for her when he saw her reduced to such wretchedness, — to these bare stone walls and thatched roof. There was nothing left of her former wealth, except the white bed, — her beautiful, curtained bed, — and Yann's eyes involuntarily rested upon it.

He said not a word. . . . Why didn't he go? The old grandmother, who was still keen in her lucid moments, pretended not to notice him. So they remained standing before each other, silent and uneasy, finally looking at each other as if to ask some vital question.

But the moments passed, and each second the silence between them seemed more intense. And they looked at each other more deeply, as if solemnly awaiting some unusual event which was long in coming.

. . . . . .

"Gaud," he asked, in a low, grave voice, "if you are still — willing — "

What was he going to say? . . . It seemed to be some great decision that he had come to suddenly, made with his usual abruptness, and that he hardly dared to formulate.

"If you are still willing . . . The fish have brought a good deal this year, and I have a little money by me. . . ."

If she was still willing! . . . What was he asking her? Had she heard aright? She was confounded by the immensity of what she believed he meant.

And the old Yvonne listened from her corner, feeling that some good fortune was coming.

"We could be married, Mademoiselle Gaud, if you are still willing. . . ."

And then he waited for her reply, which did not come. What prevented her from pronouncing that Yes? He was surprised, he was frightened; and she was well aware of it. Leaning both hands on the table, very pale, with her eyes grown dim, she had become speechless, and looked like a very pretty girl at the point of death.

"Well, Gaud, answer him!" said the old grandmother, who had risen and come toward them. "You see she is overcome, Monsieur Yann; you must excuse her; she will think about it, and answer you in a moment. Sit down, Monsieur Yann, and take a glass of cider with us."

But no, Gaud could not reply; no word came to her lips in her ecstasy. . . . So it was true that he was good, that he had some heart. She had found him again, her real Yann, such as she had never ceased to believe him, in spite of his hardness, in spite of his fierce refusal, in spite of all. He had long disdained her; he accepted her now, and now that she was poor; it was his own idea. Without doubt, he had had some motive that she would know later; at this moment she never dreamed of asking him for an explanation, any more than of reproaching him for the grief he had caused her during the last two years. All this, moreover, was forgotten; all this faded into the dim past in a second by the delicious whirlwind which was passing over her life! Still silent, she expressed her adoration only with her swimming eyes, which looked down into the depths of his soul, while a heavy rain of tears began to fall over her cheeks.

"Well, God bless you, my children!" said Grandmother Moan. "And as for myself, I owe him my thanks; for I am glad to have lived to be so old, to see this before I die."

They still remained there, standing before each other, holding each other's hands, and finding nothing to say, knowing no word sweet enough, no phrase to express their meaning, — none which seemed to them worthy of breaking the delicious silence.

"At least, kiss each other, my children. . . . Why, they don't say a word! Ah, dear me, what funny children these are, to be sure! . . . Come, Gaud, say something to him, my child. When I was young, it seems to me, people kissed each other when they became engaged."

Yann took off his hat, as if suddenly seized with a great, unusual feeling of respect, before bending over to kiss Gaud; and it seemed to him that this was the first real kiss that he had ever given in his life.

She also kissed him, pressing her fresh lips, unused to the refinement of caresses, fervently against her lover's cheek, browned by the sea. In the stone wall, the cricket sang his congratulation, — it happened fortuitously this time, — and Sylvestre's poor little picture seemed to smile from its black wreath; and everything seemed to be suddenly enlivened and freshened in the dilapidated hut. The silence was filled with unusual music; even the pale winter twilight, shining in through the little window, became a beautiful, enchanted light.

"Well, is it to take place after the return from Iceland, my good children?"

Gaud bent her head. Iceland, the *Léopoldine*, to be sure! She had forgotten these dreadful things standing in the way. After the return from Iceland! . . . How long that would be, — a whole summer of

anxious waiting! And Yann, tapping the floor rapidly with the toe of his boot, grew eager too, and quickly reckoned in his mind to see whether, by making haste, they would have time to be married before he sailed. So many days for arranging the papers, so many days for publishing the banns in church, — yes, that would bring it to the 20th or the 25th of the month for the wedding; and, if nothing hindered, they would still have a week left to live together afterward.

"I will go and tell our father the first thing," he said, with as much haste as if the very moments of their life were limited and precious.

## PART FOURTH.

### I.

LOVERS always like to sit together on the seats in front of the houses at nightfall.

Yann and Gaud also followed this custom. Every evening they made love on the old stone seat by the door of the Moans' hut.

Others have the springtime, the shade of trees, warm evenings, blooming roses. They had nothing but the February twilight, falling over this country by the sea, all rocks and furze, no green branch above their heads, nothing around them but the vast expanse of sky, where slowly passed the wandering fog, and for flowers brown seaweed, which the fishermen had brought up from the beach into the paths with their nets.

The winters are not severe in this region, warmed by the currents of the sea; but nevertheless the twilights often bring icy dampness and a fine, imperceptible rain, which settled on their shoulders.

They lingered in spite of it, finding it very pleasant there. And this seat, more than a century old, was not surprised at their love, having already seen so many others. It had heard many sweet speeches, all

alike, from generation to generation, coming from the mouths of young people; and it was accustomed to see the lovers return later on, changed to tottering old men and trembling old women, to sit in the same place, — but in the daytime then, to breathe a little fresh air and warm themselves in their last sunshine.

From time to time Grandmother Yvonne would put her head out at the door to look at them. Not that she was anxious about what they were doing together, but merely out of affection, for the pleasure of seeing them, and also to try to make them come in. She would say, —

"You will be cold, my children. You will get sick. *Ma Doué, ma Doué*, I must ask you if there is any good sense in staying out so late."

Cold! Were they cold? Were they in the least conscious of anything outside the happiness of being near each other?

The people, passing along the road in the evening, heard the gentle murmur of two voices, mingled with the roaring which the sea made below at the foot of the cliffs. It was very harmonious music, Gaud's fresh voice alternating with Yann's, which had sweet, caressing inflections in its grave tones. They could distinguish the two figures outlined on the stone wall against which they were leaning, — first, the white of Gaud's cap, then her slender form in its black dress, and beside her the square shoulders of her lover, — above them their humpbacked,

thatched roof, and back of all this the infinite twilight, the colorless void of water and sky. . . .

But at last they went in to sit down by the fireplace; and the old Yvonne, who immediately fell asleep with her head bent forward, did not much disturb the two young lovers. They began to talk together in a low voice, having to make up for two years of silence; having to make great haste about their courting, because it would be of so short duration.

It had been decided that they should live with Grandmother Yvonne; and she had bequeathed her hut to them in her will. For the present they would make no improvements, for want of time; and after Yann's return from Iceland they would carry out their plan of beautifying this poor nest, which was not beyond repair.

## II.

One evening he was amusing himself by telling her a thousand little things that she had done, or that had happened to her since their first meeting; he even told her about the dresses she had had, the merry-makings where she had been.

She listened in the greatest surprise. How did he know all this? Who would have imagined that he had paid attention to it, and that he was capable of remembering it all?

He smiled, making a mystery of it, and relating still other little details, even things that she had almost forgotten.

Now, without more interruption, she let him go on, with an unexpected rapture which entirely captivated her; she began to guess, to understand, that he had been in love with her, too, all this time! She had been his constant thought; he acknowledged it ingenuously now!

But, heavens! what had been the matter with him? Why had he repulsed her so, made her suffer so much?

Still this mystery which he had promised to solve, but the explanation of which he continually put off, looking embarrassed, and beginning to smile in an incomprehensible manner.

## III.

One beautiful day they went to Paimpol, with Grandmother Yvonne, to buy the wedding-dress.

Among the fine dresses which she still had left from the time of her prosperity there were some which could have been easily made over for the event, without her having to buy anything; but Yann had wished to make her a present of this, and she could not refuse it. To have a dress given her by him, purchased with the money from his work,

and from his fishing, it seemed to her that this would make her already in a measure his wife.

They chose black, as Gaud was still in mourning for her father. But Yann found nothing pretty enough among the materials that were shown to him. He was rather haughty with the shopkeepers; and he who would never before enter any of the shops in Paimpol for anything in the world, on this day took an interest in everything, even in the way the dress was to be made; he wished to have it trimmed with wide bands of velvet to make it handsomer.

## IV.

One evening when they were sitting on the stone seat in the solitude of their cliff, where night was coming on, their eyes chanced to rest on a thorn-bush, — the only one around, growing among the rocks by the roadside. In the twilight, it seemed as if they distinguished tiny little white tufts on this bush.

"It looks as if it were in bloom," said Yann.

And they went toward it to find out about it.

It was full of flowers. Not able to see very well, they touched it, assuring themselves, with their fingers, of the presence of the little blossoms, which were all wet with fog. And then a first fleeting impression of spring came over them; at the same

time they noticed that the days had grown longer, that the air was milder, the night more luminous.

But how forward this bush was! Nowhere, by any of the roadsides in the country, was there another one like it. Without doubt, it had blossomed there expressly for them, for their festival of love. . . .

"Oh, let us pick them!" said Yann.

And almost feeling his way, he made a bouquet with his rough hands; with his big fisherman's knife, which he carried in his belt, he carefully removed the thorns, then he placed it in Gaud's waist.

"There, you look like a bride," he said, standing back as if to see, in spite of the darkness, whether it was becoming to her.

Beneath them the sea, which was very calm, dashed feebly against the pebbles on the beach with a little intermittent murmuring, as regular as breathing in sleep; it appeared indifferent, or even favorable, to this courtship, which was going on so near.

The days seemed long as they waited for the evenings to come; and then, when they separated on the stroke of ten o'clock, they felt almost discouraged with life because they were ended so soon.

They were obliged to make haste, to hurry about the papers, about everything, for fear of not being ready, and that the happiness before them would have to be deferred until autumn, until the uncertain future.

Their courtship, carried on in the evening in this melancholy place amid the continual sound of the sea and with the feverish realization of the march of time, became singular and almost gloomy. These lovers were different from others, — more serious, more anxious in their love.

Still, he did not say what he had had against her for two years; and after he had gone in the evening, this mystery tormented Gaud. However, he loved her well, she was sure of that.

It was true that he had loved her all the time, but not as he did now. It increased in his heart and in his head like a tide which rises and rises until it fills everything; he had never loved any one like this before.

From time to time, he would stretch himself out on the stone bench almost at full length, lay his head in Gaud's lap, out of childish playfulness, to be caressed, and then very quickly straighten himself up, out of propriety. He would have liked to lie down on the ground at her feet and remain there, with his forehead against the bottom of her dress. Besides the brotherly kiss which he gave her when he came and when he went away again, he never ventured to embrace her. He worshipped the invisible something within her, which was her soul, which manifested itself to him in the pure, tranquil sound of her voice, in the expression of her smile, in her beautiful, limpid eyes. . . .

And to think that, at the same time, she was a woman of flesh, more beautiful and more desirable than any other, and that she would soon belong to him completely!

## V.

One rainy evening they were sitting together by the fire, and their grandmother Yvonne was asleep in front of them. The flames dancing among the branches in the fireplace cast exaggerated shadows of them on the black ceiling.

They were talking very low, as all lovers do. But this evening there were long awkward silences in their conversation. He, especially, said almost nothing, and bent his head with a slight smile, trying to avoid Gaud's eyes.

It was because she had plied him with questions all the evening about this mystery which she had not been able to make him explain to her, and this time he saw that he was caught. She was too keen and too determined to know; no evasion would help him out of this difficulty.

"Was it unkind remarks that people made about me?" she asked.

He tried to answer yes. Unkind remarks! oh, there had been a great many made in Paimpol and Ploubazlanec.

She asked what they were. He was confused,

and did not know what to say. Then she saw that it must be something else.

"Was it about my dress, Yann?"

He was sure that her dress had occasioned some remarks; for a time she had dressed too much to suit the wife of a simple fisherman. But at last he was compelled to admit that that was not all.

"Was it because at that time we were considered rich, and you were afraid of being refused?"

"Oh, no! not that."

He made this reply with such naïve self-assurance that Gaud was amused by it. And then another silence followed, and the roaring of the wind and sea was heard outside.

As she looked at him attentively, an idea began to dawn upon her, and her expression gradually changed.

"It was not that at all, Yann; what was it?" she said suddenly, looking him straight in the eye, with the irresistible smile of one who has guessed and is determined to know.

And he turned away his head, laughing out loud.

So that was it; she had found out. He could not give her any reason, because he didn't have any; he never had had any. Well, he had simply been obstinate (as Sylvestre once said), and that was all. But it was also because they had teased him about Gaud. Everybody took it up, — his parents, Sylvestre, his friends among the Icelanders, — even

Gaud herself. Then he had begun to say no, and to cling to it obstinately, all the while keeping the idea in the depths of his heart that some day, when nobody thought anything more about it, it would surely end by being yes.

And it was for this childishness of Yann's that Gaud had languished, deserted for two years, and had longed to die.

After his first inclination, which had been to laugh from confusion at being discovered, Yann looked at Gaud earnestly and gravely, questioning seriously, in his turn, whether she would forgive him. He felt such remorse now for having caused her so much pain; would she forgive him?

"That is my character, Gaud," he said. "At home with my parents it is the same thing. Sometimes, when I take it into my head, I remain a week as if I were angry with them, almost without speaking to anybody. And yet you know that I love them well; and I always end by obeying them in everything they wish, as if I were still a child of ten. . . . Do you suppose it was my intention not to marry? No; that would not have lasted long in any case, Gaud, you may believe."

Would she forgive him! She felt the tears rise gently to her eyes; and the last of her former grief disappeared with this confession of her Yann's. Moreover, without all her past suffering, the present hour would not have been so delicious; now that it

was over, she almost preferred to have experienced this time of trial.

Now everything was explained between them, — in an unexpected manner, it is true, but completely; there was no longer any veil between their two souls. He drew her toward him, into his arms; and they remained for a long time with their heads together, her cheek against his, having no need of explaining anything or of saying a word. And their embrace was so chaste that, when the grandmother Yvonne woke up, they remained before her just as they were, without any embarrassment.

. . . . . .

## VI.

It was six days before the departure for Iceland.

Their wedding procession was coming back from the church in Ploubazlanec, pursued by a furious wind, under a heavy black sky.

They both looked handsome, as they walked arm in arm, like a king and queen at the head of their train, walking as if in a dream. Calm, collected, serious, they seemed to see nothing, to have dominion over life, to be above everything. Even the wind seemed to respect them, while behind them the procession was a joyful confusion of laughing couples, buffeted by great gusts of the west wind. There were a great many young people overflowing with life;

others already growing gray, but who smiled still as they thought of their own wedding day and their first years of wedded life. Grandmother Yvonne was there, and followed with the rest, very light-headed, but almost happy, on the arm of an old uncle of Yann's, who paid her old-fashioned compliments; she wore a fine new cap, bought for the occasion, and the same little shawl, dyed for the third time black, out of respect to Sylvestre.

And the wind blew all these guests without distinction: skirts were lifted, and dresses turned up; hats and caps were blown off.

At the church door the bride and groom bought the customary bouquets of artificial flowers to complete their festive attire. Yann happened to fasten his on his broad chest, but he was one of those to whom everything is becoming. As for Gaud, there was something lady-like in the way she pinned the poor coarse flowers on her waist, which fitted her exquisite form extremely well, as in former days.

The fiddler, who led all the rest, distracted by the wind, played desperately. His music reached the ears in puffs, and amid the noise of the wind sounded small and comical, shriller than a sea-gull's cries.

All Ploubazlanec had come out to see them. This marriage created a sensation among the people, and they came from a long distance to the festival. Wherever the paths crossed, there were groups of

people waiting for them. Almost all the Icelanders in Paimpol, Yann's friends, were stationed thus. They saluted the bridal pair as they passed by. Gaud responded with a slight lady-like inclination of the head, with her serious grace; and all along the route she was admired.

And the hamlets round about — the most remote, the darkest, even those in the woods — sent out their beggars, their lame, their insane, and their idiots, on crutches. These people were ranged along the line of march with musical instruments, — accordions and hurdy-gurdies. They held out their hands, wooden bowls, or hats, to receive the alms Yann threw to them, with his grand, noble manner, and Gaud, with her pretty, queenly smile. Some of these beggars were very old, with gray hair on their empty heads, which had never held anything. Crouching in hollows by the roadside, they were of the same color as the earth, from which they seemed to have only half emerged, and to which they would soon return without ever giving it a thought. Their wild eyes were as distressing as the mystery of their abortive, useless lives. They looked upon this celebration of full and magnificent life without understanding it. . . .

They continued their march on beyond the hamlet of Pors-Even and the house of the Gaoses. They were going, after the traditional custom of bridal couples in the region of Ploubazlanec, to the chapel

of La Trinité, which is, as it were, at the end of the Breton country.

At the foot of the last cliff, it stands on a threshold of low rocks, close to the water, and seems to belong to the sea. To reach it, it is necessary to go down a goat-path among the granite bowlders. And the wedding procession scattered over the slope of this isolated cape among the rocks, while their joyful words and complimentary speeches were wholly lost amid the noise of the wind and the waves.

It was impossible to reach the chapel. In this rough weather the path was not safe; the sea came too near with its heavy sweep. Its white sheaves leaped high, and, falling back, spread out as if they would inundate everything.

Yann, who was ahead of the others, with Gaud leaning on his arm, was the first to retreat before the spray. Behind, the procession was arranged on the rocks as if it were an amphitheatre. And it seemed as if he had come there to present his wife to the sea; but it looked unkindly on the new bride.

Turning around, he noticed the violin-player, perched on a gray rock, and trying between two squalls to continue his contre-danse.

"Put up your music, my friend," he said to him; "the sea is playing a different tune for us, which goes better than yours."

At the same time a heavy, drenching rain, which had been threatening all the morning, began to fall.

Then there was a wild scattering, with screaming and laughter, as they tried to reach the top of the cliff, and take shelter in the Gaoses' house.

## VII.

THE wedding dinner took place at the house of Yann's parents, Gaud's house being so wretched.

It was upstairs in the large new room. Twenty-five people were seated at the table around the bridal pair, — his sisters and brothers; Cousin Gaos, the pilot; Guermeur, Keraez, Yvon Duff, all who had belonged to the old *Marie*, and were to sail on the *Léopoldine;* four very pretty maids of honor, with their braids of hair coiled above their ears like the old empresses of Byzantium, and their white caps in the new fashion for young girls, in the shape of a sea-shell; four groomsmen, all Icelanders, of fine bearing, with handsome, proud eyes.

And downstairs also, of course, they were eating and cooking. All the rest of the procession had crowded in there in confusion; and the women from Paimpol, hired to help, were bewildered before the great fireplace, filled with pans and pots.

Yann's parents would have desired for their son a richer wife, it is true; but Gaud was known to be a good, brave girl; and then, to compensate for the loss of her fortune, she was the most beautiful girl

in all the country round, and they felt pleased to see the two so well suited to each other.

The old father, after the soup, said jestingly of this marriage: —

"This will result in still more Gaoses, although there is no lack of them now in Ploubazlanec."

And, counting on his fingers, he explained to an uncle of the bride how there happened to be so many of this name: his father, who was the youngest of nine brothers, had had twelve children, all married to cousins, and all these made the Gaoses numerous, in spite of those who had been lost in Iceland.

"As for myself," he said, "I, too, married a Gaos, a relative, and we have had fourteen children."

And at the thought of all this tribe, he laughed, shaking his white head.

Heavens! what trouble he had had to bring up his fourteen little Gaoses; but now they were beginning to see their way out, and then the ten thousand francs from the wreck had really placed them in easy circumstances.

In fun, also, neighbor Guermeur told about his experiences in the *service*, — stories of the Chinese, of the Antilles, of Brazil, making the eyes of those who expected to go there, sparkle.

One of the things he remembered best, happened once on board the *Iphigénie*, when they were storing the wine-room, one evening at dusk; the leather pipe through which the wine passed down leaked. So,

instead of giving any information about it, they began to drink till they could take no more. This festivity lasted two hours. At last the whole battery was used up; everybody was drunk!

And the old sailors, who were sitting at the table, laughed heartily, like children, with a touch of malice.

"They cry against the *service*," they said. "Well, there is nothing like it for such experiences."

Outside the weather did not improve, but on the contrary, the wind and the rain were raging in thick darkness. In spite of the precautions they had taken, some were anxious about their boats anchored in the harbor, and spoke of leaving to see about them.

However, another noise, much merrier to hear, came up from below, where the youngest of the party were taking supper together, — shouts of joy, bursts of laughter from the little cousins who were beginning to feel very much exhilarated by the cider.

They had served boiled meats, roasts, chickens, several kinds of fish, omelets, and pancakes.

They had talked about fishing and smuggling, discussed all sorts of means for escaping the custom-house officers, who are, as is well known, the enemies of seafaring men.

Upstairs, at the table of honor, they were beginning to relate droll adventures.

These were told in broad Breton among men who, in their time, had roamed about the world. One said, —

"When I was quartermaster-gunner, acting as corporal of marines on the *Zénobie*, at Aden, one day, I saw the traders of ostrich feathers coming on board." (Imitating their accent): "'Good-day, corporal; we're no thieves; we're honest merchants.' With a boat-hook I sent them down four steps at a time.

"'You, honest merchants! Let me tell you to first make me a present of a bunch of feathers, then we will see whether you will be allowed to come up here with your goods.' And I might have made a pretty sum of money to carry home if I had n't been so stupid [mournfully]; but, you know, at that time I was young. . . . Besides, I had a friend in Toulon in the millinery business."

The story-telling was suddenly cut short by one of Yann's little brothers, a future Icelander, with a pleasant rosy face and bright eyes. Little Laumec grew ill all at once, from having taken too much cider, and was quickly carried out.

. . . . . .

The wind howled in the chimney like a lost spirit in torment; from time to time, with frightful force, it shook the house on its rocky foundations.

"It seems as if it were angry because we are enjoying ourselves," said the pilot cousin.

"No; it is the sea that is dissatisfied," replied Yann, smiling at Gaud, "because I promised to marry it."

However, a sort of strange languor began to come over both of them; they spoke low, holding each other's hands, isolated in the midst of the others' gayety. Knowing the effect of wine on the senses, Yann refrained from drinking that evening.

Occasionally he felt sad, as he suddenly thought of Sylvestre. . . . It had been decided not to have dancing on account of him, as well as Gaud's father.

They were at dessert; the singing would soon begin. But, first, there were prayers to be said for the deceased members of the family. At marriage festivals they never omit this religious duty; and when they saw Father Gaos rise and uncover his white head, there was silence everywhere.

"This," he said, "is for William Gaos, my father."

And, signing himself, he began the Latin prayer for the dead, —

"*Pater noster, qui es in cœlis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. . . .*"

A solemn stillness had spread even downstairs, to the merry tables of the little ones. All who were in the house repeated mentally the same everlasting words.

"This is for Yves and Jean Gaos, my brothers, lost in the sea of Iceland. . . . This is for Pierre Gaos, my son, who was shipwrecked on board the *Zélie*. . . ."

Then, after all these Gaoses had each had their prayer, he turned toward Grandmother Yvonne.

"This," he said, "is for Sylvestre Moan."

And he repeated still another. Then Yann wept. — *Sed libera nos a malo. Amen.*

Afterward the singing began, — songs learned in the *service*, on the forecastle, where there are many fine singers, as is well known, —

"Un noble corps, que celui des zouaves,
Mais chez nous les braves
Narguent le destin
Hurrah ! hurrah ! vive le vrai marin !"

The stanzas were sung by one of the groomsmen in a languishing way that went to the heart; then the chorus was taken up by other fine deep voices.

But this all sounded dim and distant to the newly wedded pair. When they looked at each other, their eyes sparkled with a hazy brilliancy, like shaded lights. They talked lower and lower, still hand in hand; and Gaud often bent her head, a gradually increasing, delicious timidity in the presence of her lord and master taking possession of her.

Now the pilot cousin went around the table, serving a certain wine of his; he had brought it with great precaution, caressing the bottle, which was on its side, and must not be disturbed, he said.

He told its history: One day when they were fishing, a cask was seen floating alone on the water. There was no way of getting it on board, it was so large; so they had broken it open on the sea and filled all the pots and mugs they had. It was im-

possible to take it all. They signalled to the other pilots and fishermen. All the sails in sight collected around this treasure trove.

"And I knew more than one who was drunk when he came back to Pors-Even that evening."

The wind continued its frightful noise.

Downstairs the children were dancing; a good many of them had gone to bed, — the youngest Gaoses, — but the others were having a great time, under the leadership of little Fantec and Laumec, who were very anxious to go outdoors to play, and every minute opened the door, letting in furious gusts of wind, which made the candles gutter.

The pilot cousin finished his story of the wine. According to his account, he had forty bottles of it. He begged them not to speak of it, because he might get into trouble with the commissioner of the maritime inscription for not declaring this discovery.

"But I must take care of these bottles," he said. "If it had been rebottled, it would have become very superior wine; for there was certainly more grape-juice in it than in the cellars of all the dealers in Paimpol."

Who could tell where this shipwrecked wine had grown? It was strong, highly colored, very much mixed with sea-water, and tasted of the salt. Nevertheless, they found it very good, and several bottles were emptied.

Their heads began to grow dizzy, the sound of

their voices became more confused, and the boys kissed the girls.

The singing continued merrily. However, there was little tranquillity of mind at this supper, and the men exchanged anxious looks on account of the bad weather, which was continually increasing.

Outside the appalling noise continued worse than ever. It seemed like one continued, swelling, threatening cry, uttered by thousands of enraged beasts, screaming with all their might with outstretched necks.

They also seemed to hear the ominous, heavy reports of marine guns in the distance; but this was the sea everywhere beating against the country of Ploubazlanec. No, it was not at all pleased; and Gaud felt her heart oppressed by this terrible music, which had not been ordered for their wedding.

About midnight, while there was a lull, Yann rose quietly, and motioned to his wife to come and speak to him.

He wanted to go home. She blushed, embarrassed and confused at having risen from the table. Then she said that it would be impolite to go away and leave the others.

"No," replied Yann; "father has given his permission. We may go."

And he led her away.

They went out stealthily.

When they found themselves outside, in the cold,

in the appalling wind, in the dark, wild night, they began to run, hand in hand. From the path on the top of the cliff the far-reaching, raging sea, from which all this noise arose, was manifest without being seen. They both ran, lashed in the face, bending forward against the blast, sometimes obliged to turn around, putting their hands to their mouths to catch their breath, taken away by the wind.

At first he lifted her around the waist, to keep her from dragging her dress, from putting her pretty shoes in all the water which covered the ground; and then he took her up in his arms, and kept on running still faster. . . . No, he had no idea that he loved her so much! And to think that she was twenty-three and he almost twenty-eight; that they might have been married at least two years before, and as happy as on this evening!

At last they reached their home in the poor little damp hut, with its roof of thatch and moss; and they lighted a candle, which the wind blew out twice, too.

The old Grandmother Moan, who had been brought home before the singing, was there, and had been for two hours in her bed, the doors of which she had closed. They went respectfully toward her, and looked at her through the openings in the door, to say good-night to her if she happened to be still awake. But they saw that her venerable face was motionless and her eyes closed; she was

asleep, or pretending to be, in order not to trouble them.

Then they felt that they were alone together.

He bent toward her to kiss her lips; but Gaud turned them away, and pressed them to Yann's cheek, which the wind had made icy cold.

Very mean, very low, was this hut of theirs, and it was very cold. Ah, if Gaud had been as rich as she was formerly, what pleasure she would have had in fitting up a pretty room, very unlike this on the bare ground! She was not yet accustomed to these walls of rough stone, the rude appearance of everything in it. But her Yann was there with her; so by his presence all was changed, transformed, and she saw nothing but him.

Around them the same invisible orchestra was still playing. Houhou! . . . Houhou! . . . The wind now gave forth a hollow roar, trembling with rage; then repeated the threat lower, as if with malicious refinement, with little sharp sounds like the shrill voice of an owl.

And the sailor's vast grave was very near, in ceaseless motion, devouring, beating against the cliffs with the same heavy blows. Some night or other he must be taken down into it to struggle with black, icy things; they knew it.

No matter! for the time they were on shore, sheltered from all this useless fury, wasted on itself.

## VIII.

THEY were husband and wife for six days.

Everybody was busy at this time preparing for the departure to Iceland. Laboring women were piling up salt for the brine in the holds of the vessels; men were putting the rigging in order; and at Yann's house his mother and sisters were working from morning till night making ready the sou'westers and the oil-skins, the complete outfit for the cruise. The weather was gloomy; and the sea, conscious of the approaching equinox, was restless and agitated.

All these inexorable preparations were distressing to Gaud, who counted the swiftly passing hours of each day, looking forward to the evening, when, after the work was over, she had her Yann to herself.

Would he go away like this every year? She hoped that she might be able to keep him at home, but she did not dare to speak about it now. However, he loved her well. He had never known anything like it before: it was different from anything else.

It was a delightful surprise to her to find her Yann, whom she had sometimes seen so disdainful to the girls in Paimpol, so gentle, so childlike. With her, on the contrary, he always showed the same courtesy, which seemed to be perfectly natural to him; and she adored the kind smile he gave her whenever

their eyes met. There is among these simple-hearted people a sentiment, an inborn respect, for the dignity of the wife; and Gaud was his wife forever.

She was very anxious in her happiness, which seemed something too unexpected, — as uncertain as a dream.

In the first place, would this love of Yann's be lasting? She sometimes thought of the adventures he had had, and she felt afraid. Would he always keep this infinite tenderness toward her, this gentle respect?

Indeed, six days of married life for a love like theirs was nothing, — nothing but a little foretaste of the life to come, which might still be so long before them! They had hardly spoken to each other, seen each other, realized that they belonged to each other. And all their plans for living together, for peaceful joy, for their household arrangements, had to be put off until his return.

Oh, in future years she must prevent him, at any cost, from going away to Iceland! But how could she do it? and what would they do for a living, when both of them were without money? And then he was so fond of his calling! . . .

She would try, in spite of everything, to keep him at home; she would use all her will power, all her intelligence, all her soul, to accomplish it. To be the wife of an Icelander, and look with sorrow on every approaching spring, pass every summer in

painful anxiety, — no; now that she adored him beyond anything she had ever imagined, she felt overwhelmed by a great fear as she thought of the years to come.

They had one springlike day, — just one. It was the day before they were to sail. They had finished putting the rigging in order on board, and Yann stayed with her all day. They walked along the roads arm in arm, like lovers, close together, and saying a thousand things to each other. The good folk smiled as they saw them pass by.

"That is Gaud, with big Yann from Pors-Even. . . . They are just married!"

It was a real spring day, this last one of theirs. It was peculiarly strange to see this sudden great calm and not a single cloud in the usually troubled sky. There was not a breath of wind. The sea had grown very peaceful; it was everywhere of the same pale blue, and perfectly calm. The sun shone with dazzling brilliancy, and the rough Breton country was impregnated with this light as if it were something precious and rare; it seemed to rejoice and revive, even in its remotest corners. The air had grown deliciously warm, with a feeling of summer in it; and it seemed as if it could never stir again, as if there never could be any more gloomy days or tempests. The grand, unvarying outlines of the promontories and bays, over which the changing shadows of clouds no longer passed, stood out in the sun-

shine; they seemed to be resting in some state of calmness which would never end. All this seemed meant to make their honeymoon sweeter, more undying; and the early spring flowers had already come, — primroses by the side of the ditches, or frail violets without perfume.

When Gaud asked, —

"How long will you love me, Yann?"

He replied, in surprise, looking her straight in the face with his handsome, honest eyes, —

"Why, Gaud, always."

And this word, said very simply by his somewhat untamed lips, seemed to express its true meaning of eternity.

She leaned on his arm. In the enchantment of having her dream come true, she pressed close to him, still anxious, feeling that he was as fugitive as a great sea-bird. To-morrow he would fly away out on the ocean! And for this time it was too late; she could do nothing to prevent him from going.

From these paths on the cliff where they were walking they overlooked all this seashore country, which was apparently without trees, carpeted with low broom, and sprinkled with stones. The houses of the fishermen were placed here and there on rocks, with their old granite walls, their high, hump-backed roofs of thatch, turning green with a new growth of moss; and in the far distance the sea, like

a grand, diaphanous vision, described its vast, unending circle, seeming to surround everything.

She was amusing herself by telling him about the astonishing, marvellous things in Paris, where she had lived; but he was very disdainful, and took no interest in it.

"So far from the coast," he said, "and so much land, so much land! . . . It must be unhealthy there. So many houses, so many people! . . . It must be very sickly in these cities. No; I am very sure that I should not care to live there."

And she smiled, surprised to see how like a simple child this great fellow was.

Sometimes their path led down into some valley, where there were real trees growing, looking as if they were hiding from the wind, from the sea. There, there was no view. The ground was covered with heaps of dead leaves and cold moisture; the sunken road, bordered with green broom, grew dark under the branches, then was contracted by the huts of some dark, solitary hamlet, crumbling to pieces from old age, and sleeping in this lowland; and some crucifix always rose high before them among the dead branches, with its great Christ of worm-eaten wood, like a corpse, with his face distorted in endless pain.

Then the path ascended again, and they overlooked the boundless horizon, and found the exhilarating air from the heights and from the sea.

He, in turn, told her about Iceland, — its pale summers without any night, its oblique sunshine which never sets. Gaud did not understand about it, and asked him to explain it to her.

"The sun goes round and round, round and round," he said, moving his outstretched arm over the circle of the distant blue waters. "It always remains very low, because, you see, it has n't strength enough to rise; at midnight it dips its edge in the sea, but at once it begins to rise again, and continues to journey round. Sometimes the moon also appears in the opposite corner of the sky. Then they both toil, each in its own quarter, and one can hardly be told from the other, they are so much alike in this country."

To see the sun at midnight! How far away this island of Iceland must be! And the fiords? Gaud had read this word inscribed many times among the names of the dead in the chapel dedicated to the shipwrecked sailors; it affected her like something ominous.

"The fiords," replied Yann, "are great bays, like this here in Paimpol, for example; only there are high mountains all around, so high that one never sees where they end, on account of the clouds above them. It is a melancholy country, Gaud, I assure you. Rocks, rocks, nothing but rocks; and the people on the island do not know what trees are.

In the middle of August, when our fishing is over, it is high time to return; for then the nights begin, and they lengthen very rapidly; the sun falls below the earth and is unable to rise again, and it is night off there all winter long.

"And then," he said, "there is a little cemetery there, on the coast of one of the fiords, just as there is here, for those from the vicinity of Paimpol who have died during the fishing season, or who have been lost at sea; it is in consecrated ground, just as here in Pors-Even, and the deceased have wooden crosses, exactly like those here, with their names written on them. The two Goazdiou, from Ploubazlanec, are there, and Guillaume Moan, also, Sylvestre's grandfather."

And she fancied she could see the little cemetery at the foot of the desolate headland, in the pale, rosy light of those endless days. Then she thought of the same dead under the ice and the black shroud of the long winter nights.

"Do you fish all the whole time," she asked, "without ever taking any rest?"

"All the time; but, then, there is the managing of the vessel, for the sea is not always calm there. Gracious! we are tired when night comes; it gives us an appetite for supper, and some days we are ravenous."

"And do you never weary of it?"

"Never!" he said, with an air of assurance which pained her. "On board ship, at sea, the time never drags, never!"

She bent her head, feeling sadder than ever, more than ever vanquished by the sea.

## PART FIVE.

### I.

AT the end of this spring day which they had had, nightfall brought back the feeling of winter, and they went in to dine in front of their fire of blazing boughs.

Their last meal together! But they had still a whole night long to sleep in each other's arms, and this expectation prevented them from being sad quite yet.

After dinner, they again felt something of the same sweet impression of spring, when they were out on the road to Pors-Even; the air was calm, almost warm, and the twilight still lingered over the country.

They went to visit their parents, for Yann to bid them farewell, and returned early to go to bed, having planned to rise at daybreak.

### II.

THE next morning the wharf at Paimpol was filled with people. The departure of the Icelanders had begun two days before, and at each tide a new group sailed away. This morning fifteen vessels were to

start with the *Léopoldine*, and the wives or the mothers of these sailors were all present to see them off. Gaud was surprised to find herself among them, now also become an Icelander's wife, and brought there for the same cruel reason. Fate had precipitated so much upon her in the last few days, that she had hardly had time to realize the actual state of things. Gliding with irresistible rapidity over a steep slope, she had come to this crisis, which was inexorable, and to which she must now submit, like all the others, who were accustomed to such things.

She had never been present at any such scenes, at these leave-takings; all this was new and strange. Among these women she had no equal, and felt isolated, different from them; her past life as a young lady, which still held sway in spite of everything, kept her aloof from them.

The weather continued fine on this day of their separation; but in the offing a great heavy swell was coming from the west, predicting wind; and in the distance they could see the sea, waiting for all these men, breaking outside.

Around Gaud there were others who, like her, were very pretty and very touching, with their eyes full of tears; there were others also, amused and laughing, who had no heart, or who, for the moment, cared for no one. Old women, feeling that death was near, wept as they parted from their sons; lovers held each other in long embraces; and tipsy sailors

were heard singing to drown their thoughts; while others went on board looking down-hearted, as if they were going to their death.

And some cruel things took place: some unfortunate fellows who had been led to sign their contract through false pretences some day in the public-house, were now forced to embark; they were compelled by their own wives and policemen. Others, whose resistance was feared on account of their superior strength, had been made drunk, as a means of precaution; they were brought on stretchers, and carried, as if they were dead, down into the holds of the vessels.

Gaud was frightened as she saw them pass. What sort of companions was her Yann going to live with? And what a terrible thing this profession of the Icelanders must be, to make such an exhibition as this, and to inspire men with such fear!

However, there were other sailors who were smiling, who, doubtless, like Yann, loved the life on the ocean and deep-sea fishing. They were good fellows; they looked noble and handsome. If they were unmarried, they went away light-hearted, casting a last look at the girls; if married, they embraced their wives or their little ones tenderly and sadly, and with great hopes of returning much richer. Gaud felt somewhat reassured as she saw that they were all like this on board the *Léopoldine*, which really had a crew of picked men.

The vessels sailed two by two, four by four, towed outside by tug-boats; and as they moved away, the sailors on the wharf, uncovering their heads, sang in a loud voice the hymn to the Virgin, "Hail, Star of the Sea!" the women's hands waved a last farewell, and tears fell down on their muslin cap-strings.

As soon as the *Léopoldine* had started, Gaud turned her steps swiftly toward the Gaoses' house. After walking an hour and a half along the coast, by the familiar path from Ploubazlanec, she reached her new relatives, at the extreme end of the district.

The *Léopoldine* was to anchor in the roadstead, opposite Pors-Even, and would not sail definitely until the evening; so it was there that they were to have their last meeting. Indeed, he came back in the ship's yawl; he came back to spend three last hours with her.

On shore, where the swell was not felt, the same beautiful spring weather continued, — the same peaceful sky. They went out on the road arm in arm for a time. This recalled their walk of the previous day, only the night would find them together no longer. They walked on aimlessly, retracing their steps toward Paimpol, and soon found themselves near their own house, having reached it unconsciously, without thinking about it. So they went in for a last time, and Grandmother Yvonne was startled to see them coming back together.

Yann gave Gaud some instructions about various little things which he had left in their clothes-press, especially in regard to his fine wedding clothes, — to unfold them occasionally, and put them in the sun. (Sailors learn how to be careful on board the war-ships.) And Gaud smiled to see how knowing he was. He might be very sure, however, that everything he had would be preserved and lovingly cared for.

However, these things were of only secondary importance to them. They talked about them for the sake of talking, — to deceive themselves. . . .

Yann told her how, on board the *Léopoldine*, they had just drawn lots for their fishing-posts, and that he was very much pleased to have won one of the best. He had to explain this to her, as she knew almost nothing about the customs of the Icelanders.

"You see, Gaud," he said, "on the gunnel of our vessels there are holes made in certain places, which we call *trous de mecques*; in these are fixed little wheel-like supports, through which we pass our lines. So, before sailing, we play for these holes with dice, or with numbers shaken up in the cabin-boy's cap. Each of us draws one, and during the entire cruise he has no right to place his line anywhere else; no change can be made. Well, my post is to be in the stern of the vessel, which is the place, as you know, where the greatest number of fish are caught; and

then it is near the main shrouds, where one can always fasten a piece of sail-cloth, an oil-skin, to make a little protection of some sort for the face from all the snow and hail off there. This is very useful, you understand; the skin does not get so burned during the bad squalls, and the eyes see clearly for a much longer time."

They talked low, low, as if they were afraid of frightening away the moments they had remaining, of making the time fly faster. Their conversation had the nature of something which is to end inexorably; their most insignificant little remarks seemed to become at this time mysterious and final.

At the last moment before his departure, Yann took his wife in his arms, and pressed her to him, without saying a word, in one long silent embrace.

He sailed away. The gray sails were unfurled to catch a light breeze which was rising in the west. She still recognized him, as he waved his cap in a way they had agreed upon. And for a long time, she watched her Yann, a mere silhouette on the sea, going away from her. The little human figure standing black against the ashy blue of the waters was still he, and now indistinct, lost in the distance, where her eyes, still persisting in fastening themselves, became confused, and could see no more.

As the *Léopoldine* sailed away, Gaud, as if drawn by a magnet, followed along at the foot of the cliffs.

She was soon obliged to stop, because the land came to an end; then she sat down at the foot of a last tall cross, which was set up there among the broom and the rocks. As it was a high point of land, the sea, from there, seemed to rise in the distance; and the *Léopoldine*, as it moved away, appeared to rise gradually, a mere speck, on the slopes of this immense circle. The waters had great slow undulations, — like the last consequence of some terrible storm which had taken place far beyond the horizon; but as far as the eye could reach, where Yann still was, everything remained peaceful.

Gaud still watched the vessel, trying to fix its appearance well in her memory, — the shape of its sails and its lines, — that she might recognize it while yet a long way off, when she should come back to this same place to wait for its return.

Enormous billows continued to come from the west regularly, one after another, without rest, unceasingly, renewing their useless efforts, breaking against the same rocks, dashing into foam in the same places, and washing over the same beaches. And after long continuance, this heavy disturbance of the water, with the serenity of the air and sky, seemed strange; it was as if the bed of the sea was too full, and was striving to overflow and encroach upon the shore.

Meantime, the *Léopoldine* grew smaller and smaller, more and more distant and dim. The currents

evidently carried it along, for the breezes this evening were faint, and yet it sailed away swiftly. Having become a little gray spot, almost a point, it would soon reach the extreme edge of the circle of visible things and would pass on into the infinity beyond where it was beginning to grow dark.

At seven o'clock in the evening, night came on, the boat was out of sight, and Gaud went back home, very brave on the whole, in spite of the tears which kept coming to her eyes. But how different, how much gloomier would have been the void, if he had gone away again, as on the two previous years, without even saying good-by! While now everything was changed, made sweeter; her Yann was so much to her. She felt herself so beloved, in spite of his going away, that, as she returned alone to her home, she at least had the consolation and the delicious expectation of that *au revoir* they had said to each other for the autumn.

## III.

THE summer passed, — sad, warm, peaceful. She watched for the first yellow leaves, the first gatherings of swallows, the blooming of the chrysanthemums.

She wrote to him several times by the packets from Reikiawik and by the *chasseurs;* but one was never sure that these letters would reach their destination.

The last of July she received one from him. He told her that he was in good health at the time it was dated, the tenth of the month, that the fishing season had begun finely, and that he already had fifteen hundred fish for his share. From beginning to end, it was in the simple style, and copied after the uniform example of all the letters from these Icelanders to their families. Men brought up as Yann had been, know absolutely nothing about writing the thousand and one things that they think, that they feel, or imagine. More cultivated than he, the knew how to make allowance for this, and to read between the lines the deep affection which was not expressed. Several times, in the course of the four pages, he gave her the name of wife, as if he took pleasure in repeating it. And, moreover, the address alone — *To Madame Marguérite Gaos, the Moans' house, in Ploubazlanec* — was something that she read over and over with delight. She had as yet had so little time to be called *Madame Marguérite Gaos!*

## IV.

She worked hard during the summer months. The Paimpol women, who at first distrusted her ability as an improvised work-woman, saying that she had too pretty, ladylike hands, had come to see, on the contrary, that she excelled in making their

dresses, which improved their figure; so she had become almost renowned as a dressmaker.

What she earned was spent in improving the house for his return. The clothes-press, the old bunks, were repaired, polished, with shining metal-work; she had arranged the window with new glass and curtains; she had purchased a new blanket for winter, a table, and chairs.

All this without touching the money that Yann had left her when he went away, and which she kept intact, in a little Chinese box, to show him when he came back.

During the summer evenings, in the last hours of daylight, as she sat before the door with Grandmother Yvonne, whose head and ideas had noticeably improved in the warm weather, she busied herself knitting a handsome fisherman's shirt of blue wool for Yann; on the edge of the collar and cuffs there were marvels of complicated open stitches; Grandmother Yvonne, who had formerly been a skilful knitter, little by little recalled the patterns of her younger days to teach them to her. And this work had taken a great deal of yarn, for Yann required a very large shirt.

They were beginning to notice, especially in the evening, that the days were growing shorter; certain plants, which had done blooming in July, began to look yellow, as if they were dying, and the blue flea-bane was blooming again by the side of the

road, but smaller and with longer stems. Finally, the last days of August came, and the first Iceland vessel appeared in sight one evening, off Pors-Even. The happy time of their return had begun.

The people gathered in a crowd on the cliff to meet it. Which one was it?

It was the *Samuel Azénide*, — always ahead of the others.

"Surely," said Yann's old father, "the *Léopoldine* will soon come in; out there, I know, when one starts to come home, the others do not linger behind."

## V.

THE Icelanders were returning, — two the second day, four the next, and then twelve the following week. And throughout the country, joy came back with them, and there was great festivity among the wives, among the mothers; festivity also at the public-houses, where the pretty Paimpol girls served drinks to the fishermen.

The *Léopoldine* was among those which were overdue; there were ten which had not yet come back. It could not be much longer; and Gaud, thinking that even if she allowed for the delay of a week at the very longest, in order not to be disappointed, Yann would be there, was in a delicious intoxication of expectancy, keeping everything in the house in order, neat and tidy, to receive him.

Everything was arranged, so there was nothing left for her to do; and, moreover, in her impatience she no longer had the head for anything of any importance.

Three of the delayed vessels arrived, and then five more. Only two were still missing.

"Well," they said to her, with a laugh, "this year either the *Léopoldine* or the *Marie-Jeanne* will *sweep up after the others.*"

And Gaud began to laugh, too, prettier and more animated than ever in her joy at expecting him home.

## VI.

MEANTIME the days were passing.

She continued to take pains with her dress, to assume a gay appearance, to go to the harbor to talk with the others. She said that this delay was quite natural. Did it not happen every year? And then they were such good sailors, and two such good vessels!

Then, in the evening, after she returned home, she began to experience the first little tremors of anxiety and distress.

Was it really possible that she began to have fears so soon? Could anything have happened?

And she was startled by being already alarmed.

## VII.

THE tenth of September! How the days were fleeting!

One morning, when there was already a cold mist hanging over the ground, — a real autumn morning, — the rising sun found her sitting very early under the porch of the chapel in memory of the ship-wrecked sailors, in the place where the widows go to pray, sitting with her eyes fixed, feeling as if her temples were bound with an iron ring.

For two days this melancholy mist had been seen at dawn; and this morning Gaud had wakened with a sharper anxiety, on account of this suggestion of winter. What was this day, this hour, this minute, more than those that had gone before? Vessels are very often two weeks and even a month behindhand.

There was evidently something peculiar about this morning, since she had come for the first time to sit under the porch of this chapel, and to re-read the names of the young men who had died.

In memory of
Gaos, Yvon, lost at sea
in the vicinity of the Norden-Fiord. . . .

. . . . . .

A squall of wind was heard, like a great shiver rising from the sea, and, at the same time, something fell on the roof like rain, — dead leaves! A whole host of them came in under the porch; the old

dishevelled trees in the yard were being stripped, shaken by this wind from the ocean. Winter was coming!

Lost at sea
in the vicinity of the Norden-Fiord,
in the hurricane of the 4th and 5th of August, 1880.

. . . . . .

She read mechanically, and through the arched doorway her eyes looked far out toward the sea; this morning it was very dim in the gray mist, and a curtain of clouds hung over it in the distance like a great pall.

Another gust of wind, and dead leaves came dancing in. A stronger squall, as if the west wind, which had sown these dead over the sea, were trying to torment even these inscriptions, recalling their names to the living.

Gaud's eyes, with involuntary persistency, rested on an empty space on the wall which seemed to be waiting with terrible importunity; she was pursued by the thought of a new tablet, which it might be necessary to place there soon, with another name, which, even in her mind, she did not dare repeat in such a place.

She felt cold, and remained sitting on the granite seat with her head thrown back against the stone.

Lost in the vicinity of the Norden-Fiord,
in the hurricane of the 4th and 5th of August, 1880,
at the age of 23 years. . . .
May he rest in peace!

Iceland appeared to her with its little cemetery, — far, far off Iceland, lighted from underneath by the midnight sun. . . . And suddenly — still in the same empty space on the wall, which seemed to be waiting — there came to her with horrible clearness a vision of this new tablet which she had imagined: a fresh tablet, a death's head and cross-bones, and in the centre, in a flourish, a name, — the adored name, *Yann Gaos!* Then she jumped up, uttering a hoarse cry, like a mad woman.

Outside, the gray morning mist still hung over the ground; and the dead leaves continued to come dancing in.

Footsteps on the path! Was some one coming? Then she rose very erect, quickly adjusted her head-dress, and composed her face. The steps came nearer; some one was coming in. She quickly assumed the appearance of having happened in there, not willing yet for anything in the world to look like the wife of a shipwrecked sailor.

It was none other than Fante Floury, the wife of the mate on the *Léopoldine.* She understood at once what Gaud was doing there; it was useless to try to deceive her. And at first the two women remained silent, face to face, still more alarmed and displeased with each other for having met in the same sentiment of terror, almost hating each other.

"All those from Tréguier and Saint-Brienc have

been home for a week," said Fante at last, pitilessly, in a dull voice, as though irritated.

She had brought a candle to make a votive offering.

"Oh, yes!—a votive offering. . . ." Gaud had not yet cared to think of this means for the desolate. But she went into the chapel behind Fante without saying a word, and they knelt down near together like two sisters.

They said ardent prayers with their whole soul to the Virgin, Star of the Sea. And soon nothing was heard but the sound of sobbing, and their tears began to fall fast on the floor.

They rose feeling more kindly, more confidential. Fante helped Gaud as she tottered, and, throwing her arms about her, gave her a kiss.

Having wiped away their tears, arranged their hair, brushed from their skirts the saltpetre and dust of the flags where they had knelt down, they went away without saying anything more, by different paths.

## VIII.

THIS last of September was like another summer, only it was a little melancholy. The weather was really so beautiful this year that if it had not been for the dead leaves falling in a sad shower along the roads one would have supposed it was the merry

month of June. Husbands, *fiancés*, lovers, had all come back; and everywhere was the joy of a second springtime of love.

Finally, one day, one of the two vessels from Iceland which were overdue was signalled in the offing. Which one was it?

Groups of silent, anxious women quickly formed on the cliff.

Gaud, pale and trembling, was there, by the side of her Yann's father.

"I firmly believe," said the old fisherman, — "I firmly believe that it is they! A red rail, a gaff topsail, — that certainly looks like it. What do you say, Gaud, my daughter?

"But no," he added, with sudden discouragement; "we are mistaken again. The jibboom is not the same, and they have a flying-jib. Well, it 's not the one this time; it 's the *Marie-Jeanne*. Oh, surely, my daughter, they will come soon."

And day followed day, and each night came at its accustomed time, with inexorable tranquillity.

She went on dressing for his coming, somewhat as if she had lost her reason, still afraid of looking like the wife of a shipwrecked sailor, exasperated when others assumed an air of mysterious compassion toward her, turning away her face to avoid meeting their eyes, which chilled her to the bone.

Now she was in the habit of going early in the

morning to the extreme end of the territory, on the high cliff at Pors-Even, passing behind her Yann's home, that his mother and little sisters might not see her. She went all alone to the farthest point of the district of Ploubazlanec, which stands out like a deer's horn against the gray channel, and sat there all day long at the foot of an isolated cross overlooking the wide expanse of waters.

These granite crosses are everywhere, rising on the projecting cliffs of this land of sailors as if asking for mercy, as if trying to appease the great, restless, mysterious thing which lures men away and does not give them back, and prefers to keep the handsomest, the most valiant ones.

Around this cross at Pors-Even the moors were always green, carpeted with short furze; and at this height the sea air was very pure, having scarcely any of the salt smell of sea-weed, but full of the delicious odors of September.

All the projections of the coast for a long distance could be traced, one after another. The land of Brittany ended in jagged points, stretching along on the tranquil nothingness of the waters.

In the foreground rocks riddled the sea, but beyond nothing troubled its mirror-like surface; it made a little, light, caressing, far-reaching sound, which came up from every bay. And it extended afar so calm, reached away down so gently! The great blue nothing, the tomb of the Gaos family, kept its impene-

trable mysteriousness, while the winds, gentle as zephyrs, brought the odor of the low broom, which was blooming for the second time, in the last autumn sunshine.

At certain regular hours the tide fell, and the shallow place grew larger everywhere, as if the Channel were slowly emptying itself; then, with the same slowness, the waters rose again, and went on endlessly coming and going, caring naught for the dead.

And Gaud remained sitting at the foot of her cross, in the midst of this tranquillity, watching until night came on, until nothing more could be seen.

## IX.

SEPTEMBER had just ended. She could take no food, neither could she sleep.

She now remained at home, and sat crouching with her hands between her knees, her head thrown back against the wall behind her. What was the use of rising? What was the use of going to bed? She threw herself on her bed without undressing when she became too much exhausted. At other times she remained always in that place, sitting paralyzed. Her teeth chattered with cold in her inactivity; she still felt as if an iron band compressed her temples; her cheeks felt drawn; her mouth was dry, with a

feverish taste in it; and at intervals she groaned hoarsely, and kept it up spasmodically for a long, long time, while she beat her head against the stone wall.

Or else she called him by name, very tenderly, in a low voice, as if he were very near her, and spoke loving words to him.

Sometimes she would think of other things besides him, — of little, insignificant things. She would amuse herself, for example, by watching the shadow of the faïence Virgin and the holy-water basin slowly lengthening on the high wood-work of her bed as the sun went down. And then her anguish would return, growing still more terrible, and she would begin to cry out again and beat the wall with her head.

And all the hours of the day passed, one after another, and all the hours of the evening, and all those of the night, and all those of the morning. When she considered how long it had been since the time when he ought to have returned, still greater terror took possession of her; she did not wish to know anything more about dates, or the names of the days.

Of those who are shipwrecked in Iceland there are usually some indications: those who return may have seen the tragedy from a distance; or else they may have found some part of the wreck, a corpse,

or have some sign for forming conclusions. But nothing had been seen of the *Léopoldine;* nothing was known. Those on the *Marie-Jeanne,* the last to see her, the second of August, said that she must have gone to fish farther north; and after that all was an impenetrable mystery.

Waiting, always waiting, without knowing anything! When would the moment come when she would really wait no longer? She did not even know that, and now she was almost eager to have it soon.

Oh, if he were dead, at least let them be kind enough to tell her so!

Oh, to see him as he was at that moment, — to see him, or what was left of him! . . . If only the Virgin, to whom she had prayed so much, or some other power like her, would do her the favor, by a sort of second sight, to show him to her, her Yann, — himself, living, sailing for home, or else his body tossed by the sea, . . . that she might at least be sure, that she might know!

Sometimes she would suddenly feel as if there was a sail coming into sight on the edge of the horizon; the *Léopoldine* was approaching, hastening to reach shore! Then she would start involuntarily to get up, to run and look out on the water to see if it were true.

She would fall back into her seat. Alas! where was the *Léopoldine* now? Where could it be?

Off there, without doubt, off there in that frightfully distant Iceland, deserted, broken to pieces, lost!

And this always ended in the same persistent vision: a wreck, broken open and empty, rocked on a silent, rosy gray sea; rocked slowly, slowly, noiselessly, with extreme gentleness, so ironical in the midst of a dead calm on the vast waters.

## X.

Two o'clock in the morning.

She listened attentively to every approaching footstep, especially at night. The least noise, the slightest unusual sound, made her temples throb; from straining to hear everything outside, they had become frightfully painful.

Two o'clock in the morning. On this night, as usual, with folded hands and open eyes in the darkness, she was listening to the everlasting wind blowing across the moor.

Suddenly she heard a man's footsteps, — footsteps hurrying along the road! Who could be passing at such an hour? She sprang up, agitated to the bottom of her soul, her heart ceasing to beat.

Some one stopped at the door, came up the little stone steps.

Yann! Oh, heavenly joy, 't was he! Some one rapped; could it be any one else? She was standing

in her bare feet; so weak for the last few days, she had leaped like a cat, with open arms to throw them about her dearly beloved one. Probably the *Léopoldine* had come in, in the night, and had anchored in the bay at Pors Even, and he had hastened to her; she settled all this in her mind with lightning rapidity. And now she bruised her fingers in the door fastenings in her madness to draw back the bolt, which was hard to move.

. . . . . .

Ah! — And then she slowly drew back, overcome, her head dropping on her breast. Her lovely dream of madness was over. It was only her neighbor Fantec. When she realized that it was only he, and that there was no sign whatever of her Yann, she felt gradually plunged back into the same gulf, to the very bottom of the same frightful despair.

Poor Fantec excused himself: his wife, as she knew, was very ill indeed, and now their child, taken with a bad sore throat, was strangling in its cradle; so he had to ask her assistance, while he went on his way to get a physician in Paimpol.

What was all this to her? Grown cruel in her own grief, she felt no sympathy for the troubles of others. Throwing herself into a chair, she remained there before him, with her eyes fixed as if she were dead, without making any reply, without listening, or even looking at him. What were these things that this man was telling her, to her?

Then he understood; he saw why she had opened the door so quickly, and he felt sorry for having caused her pain.

He mumbled some words of excuse.

It was true that he ought not to have disturbed her — her!

"Me!" Gaud replied quickly; "and why not *me*, Fantec?"

Life suddenly returned to her, for she did not wish to seem desperate in the eyes of others; she did not wish that at all. And, moreover, she, in turn, felt sorry for him. She dressed to follow him, and found strength to go and care for his little child.

When she returned at four o'clock, and threw herself on her bed, sleep overcame her for a moment, because she was very tired.

But that moment of great joy left an impression in her mind which remained there in spite of everything. She soon awoke with a start, half getting up, as if she remembered something. There had been some news about Yann; amid the confused thoughts which came back to her she tried and tried to think what it was.

"Ah, nothing, alas! No; nothing but Fantec."

And for a second time she fell to the very bottom of the same abyss. No; in reality there was nothing different in her dismal, hopeless waiting.

However, having felt him so near her was as if something emanating from him had been floating around her. It was what they call in Brittany a *pressigne;* and she listened more attentively to the steps outside, with a presentiment that some one would perhaps come and tell her about him.

Indeed, as soon as it was day Yann's father came in. He took off his cap, pushed back his beautiful white hair, which curled like his son's, and sat down beside Gaud's bed.

He, too, was broken-hearted; for his Yann, his handsome Yann, was his eldest, his favorite, his glory. But he had not given him up, not really; he had not given him up yet. He tried to reassure Gaud in a very gentle manner. In the first place, the last comers from Iceland all spoke of very thick fog, which might have retarded the vessel; and then, moreover, he had an idea that they might have put into port in the distant Feroë Islands, which are situated on the route, and from which letters are a long time in coming. This had happened to him forty years before; and his poor mother, now dead, had had a Mass said for his soul. The *Léopoldine* was such a fine vessel, and the sailors on board all so skilful!

The old Grandmother Moan walked around them, shaking her head. Her granddaughter's distress had almost restored her strength and mind. She kept the house in order, looking from time to time

at the little yellow picture of her Sylvestre hanging on the stone wall, with its anchors and the funeral wreath of black beads. Since the following of the sea had taken her grandson from her, she had no faith in sailors' returning. She only prayed to the Virgin through fear, with the tips of her poor old lips, keeping a strong feeling of spite against her in her heart.

Gaud listened eagerly to these consoling words. Her big eyes, with circles around them, looked with deep affection at this old man, who resembled her dearly beloved one. Just having him there near her was a protection against death; and she felt more reassured, nearer to her Yann. Her tears fell silently, more gently, and she repeated to herself ardent prayers to the Virgin, Star of the Sea.

That they had put in at these islands, possibly for repairs, was really quite possible. She rose, smoothed her hair, and made a sort of toilet for him, as if he might return. Doubtless all was not lost, since his father still had hope; and for several days she began to watch for him again.

It was really autumn, late autumn, with dismal nightfalls, when everything grew dark early in the old hut, and dark also all about in the old Breton country.

The days themselves seemed only twilight; immense clouds, passing slowly, would suddenly bring darkness at high noon. The wind roared constantly

like the distant sound of great church-organs playing evil, despairing tunes; at other times it would come close against the door, beginning to howl like wild beasts.

She had grown pale, pale, and became more and more dejected, as if old age had touched her with its bare wing. Very often she took out her Yann's belongings, his fine wedding clothes, unfolding them and folding them up again like an insane woman, paying special attention to one of his blue woollen shirts which had kept the shape of his form. When it was thrown gently on the table, it showed the outline of his shoulders and chest, as if it had been worn; so finally she laid it all by itself on a shelf in their clothes-press, to keep it undisturbed, that it might preserve this imprint still longer.

Every evening cold mists rose from the ground; then she would look out the window, across the melancholy moor, where little plumes of white smoke were beginning to rise here and there from the other huts. Everywhere else the men had returned, migratory birds, brought back by the cold. And before many of these fires the evenings would be sweet; for the renewal of love had begun with the winter throughout this country of Icelanders.

Possessed with the thought that he might have put in at these islands, having recovered a sort of hope, she had begun to look for him again.

. . . . . .

## XI.

He never came back.

One night in August, off there in the waters of gloomy Iceland, amid a great raging noise, his marriage with the sea had been celebrated.

With the sea, which had formerly been his nurse, the sea which had cradled him, which had made him a great strong youth, and then had taken him back in his superb manliness for herself; a deep mystery enveloped these frightful nuptials. All the time dark veils stirred above; curtains moving and tossing were spread to conceal their festival; and the bride spoke out, all the while making a great horrible noise to drown his cries. He, remembering Gaud, his wife of flesh, struggled with a giant's strength against this bride of the tomb until the moment when he yielded, opening his arms to receive her, with a great profound cry like a dying bull, his mouth already filled with water, his arms open, extended, stiffened forever.

And all those whom he had at one time invited were present at his wedding, — all, except Sylvestre, who had gone to sleep in the enchanted gardens, far, far away on the other side of the earth.

THE END.

April 1, 1896.

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